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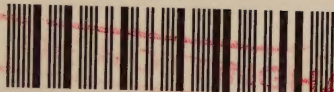
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ALFIERI AND GOLDONI.

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# ALFIERI AND GOLDONI

THEIR

LIVES AND ADVENTURES.

BY

EDWARD COPPING.



LONDON:

ADDEY AND CO., HENRIETTA STREET,  
COVENT GARDEN.

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MDCCLVII.



PRESENTED

BY

*W. Henry Thomas Hall*

*1876*



# DEDICATION.

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TO

MRS. YAPP.

MY DEAR MADAM,

THERE are certain debts of friendship which we are never rich enough to pay, but which in our heart-poverty we can, at least, acknowledge with grateful and willing spirit. When I recal the many delightful hours passed in your society, with those who are so dear to you, and to whom you are so dear, I feel that I have incurred such debts, and that it is to you they are owing. Can I do less, then, than avail myself of the opportunity afforded me of admitting my obligation, in dedicating this work to you? In acting thus I am but fulfilling a duty; but how agreeable that duty is! If all similar acts brought with them similar pleasure, by what flowery paths should we journey through life!

Believe me,

My dear Madam,

With much respect,

Yours very sincerely,

EDWARD COPPING.





## P R E F A C E.

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IN writing the lives of men who have themselves supplied the materials with which their picture is to be painted, the labours of the biographer may be said to increase in one direction, in the same proportion as they are diminished in another. If a writer, thus situated, is spared many wearying and irksome duties, others in return are demanded of him, which claim his care and attention almost to the same extent. He has not, it is true, to pursue minute investigations through the wandering paths of obscure history ; he has not to search the records of genealogy ; to explore the dark ways of legal documents ; to gather from the lips of old age the trembling reminiscences of distant years ; or to harmonise the varying traditions he may have collected, of friends, family, and kindred. All or nearly all these labours are spared him. His difficulties come from other sources. The story has been told the pallet is prepared for his hand ; brushes and colours are by his side ; the canvas is ready ;—but he has yet

to paint his picture. According to the use of the materials found him, he may make it a daub, or a work of Art.

Perhaps the chief difficulty in employing such materials is to decide what to use, and what to reject ; more especially when, as in the present work, the object of the author is to give a miniature photograph rather than a full-length painting. Many circumstances which, although trivial in themselves, enter appropriately into detailed memoirs, would be out of place in more confined space. Selection must be made ; the spirit rather than the substance of numberless facts must be given ; attention must be drawn only to those which bear with the greatest significance upon the whole. It is the history of a year that is to be written, not the history of three hundred and sixty-five separate days. We want the portrait of a man, not a distinct study of his every feature.

I have not described difficulties for the purpose of conveying the impression that I have overcome them. It is a means of securing praise and confidence beforehand, which, in the end, are sometimes found to be undeserved. There is a great difference between merely seeing the chasm, and bounding with dexterity across it. We may have sufficient sharpness of vision to detect danger, but not enough strength of limb to escape it. I approached my labours in a spirit full of energy, and with a love for the subject that may have misled me as to the extent of my own powers. If it

has deceived me, however, others will, I know, be less easy of faith.

The names of Alfieri and Goldoni may well be associated in the history of the Italian Stage, although no two minds could be more dissimilar; no two authors less susceptible of comparison. The one in Tragedy, the other in Comedy, introduced new life into the dramatic art at a time when to the fever of disease had succeeded the torpor of inanition. Goldoni, by his marvellous fertility of invention, his readiness of composition, and his undoubted comic ability, raised the Italian stage from the pitiful state of degradation in which it had fallen to a condition of comparative importance. Alfieri, by the invincible power of his resolution, by his indomitable genius, triumphing over every obstacle of position and character, founded a school of elevated tragedy, which has not yet, perhaps, yielded all the fruits it is capable of bearing.

I have endeavoured to bring before the reader the two Italian dramatists—for they fairly deserve that special title—surrounded by the essential circumstances of their lives, displayed in the most faithful light. The memoirs they themselves have written have not alone been consulted for this purpose. Few men can write their lives so completely as to leave nothing but the date of their death and burial to be filled in by a strange hand. While there was but little, however, to add to the copious and gossiping volumes of Goldoni, the case was different with Alfieri. The former led a life full of adventure and

variety it is true, but without incident that ever detached itself from the ordinary domestic interest of personal narrative. Alfieri's life, on the contrary, is associated to some extent with the history of his country. He laboured with a great and noble motive. His name is inscribed on those banners of Freedom that, assuredly, will some day again flutter in the southern breeze.

He was a man, therefore, to excite attention during life, and to grow in interest after. More has been written about him than about Goldoni; for he is a far larger theme. Although the memoirs he has left us deal at length with all the important events of his career, and are carried up to within a few months before his death, many points in connection with that career required additional development and illustration. The Countess of Albany, for instance, who exercised such a powerful influence over his life, is not presented to us so completely as could be wished. It is impossible to close Alfieri's pages without feeling a desire to know more of that beautiful and accomplished woman;—more than Alfieri chose to give;—more than it was in his power to give. Facts bearing upon these and other circumstances are introduced into the present volume, and are not, the author believes, to be found in any other English version of Alfieri's life. Indeed, a really correct copy of his "Memoirs" cannot be said to have been published, even in Italian, until 1853, when the Florence edition of that year appeared. Carefully collated with the original MS., it was the first to restore many passages which had been omitted



from the earliest and all succeeding editions. It contained also a number of letters of Alfieri and his friends, many of which were published for the first time. All these have been attentively examined for this work, and wherever the information they contained was deemed of service, it has been made use of. Thus, if no great and striking facts of Alfieri's life are added to this narrative, many new and interesting details are brought forward, which give it completeness.

In conclusion, I have to express my thanks to Mr. Bayle St. John for the valuable suggestions he has afforded me in the course of this work. Recently returned from a residence in the country where Alfieri was born, he had regarded that author from a nearer point of view than I had attained; and, in many leisure hours we agreeably passed together, gave me much information that deserves this open acknowledgment.

Paris: November, 1856.



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# VITTORIO ALFIERI.

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## CHAPTER I.

### CHILDHOOD OF ALFIERI.

IT was in the Piedmontese city of Asti, and on the 17th of January, 1749, that Count Vittorio Alfieri first saw the light. The chamber in which he was born still remains, and, together with his portrait and an autograph letter to his sister, is one of the sights shown to visitors. Both his parents were noble: his mother, Monica-Maillard de Tournon, widow of the Marquis of Cacherano; his father, Antonio Alfieri, a gentleman of independent means, who had never soiled his mind with ambition or his hands with labour. They had married when Antonio Alfieri was at the ripe age of fifty-five. Two years after a daughter had resulted from this union Vittorio Alfieri was born.

The pride and delight of his father, then in his sixtieth year, were unbounded. He saw in the new-born child a promise that his name and rank would be perpetuated, and nothing could equal the fondness he displayed towards his little son. When the infant was sent away to nurse at a village about two miles distant from Asti,

he could not rest without going to see it every day. He was strong and robust, although so far advanced in years, and performed his journey on foot. No matter how unfavourable might be the weather, he never failed in his visit. Ere long, however, this practice cost him his life. One day, having overheated himself upon the road, he was seized with an inflammation of the lungs. In a few days more it led him to the tomb. Vittorio Alfieri was then barely a year old.

His mother quickly re-married. She had had by her first union two daughters and a son; and by her second, a son and a daughter. This was a family which, under less favourable circumstances, might have served as a barrier against further suitors. But she was young, wealthy, and noble. She soon gained a third husband, the Chevalier Giacinto Alfieri di Magliano, a relative of the house into which she had last married. This union was, perhaps, her happiest. The Chevalier was about her own age, was of good appearance, and of pleasing manners. They loved each other fondly: he became a kind father to her children, and all lived in perfect harmony and happiness.

At the age of five years Alfieri's sorrows commenced, and with them the development of a disposition in many respects remarkable. He was attacked with a dysentery, and so violently that recovery seemed hopeless. In the bitter suffering the poor little fellow experienced, he prayed for death as a relief from his misery. He knew nothing of the dread remedy he asked for; but a young brother had died some time before, and had become, he was told, an angel! He wished to follow in the footsteps of that good and happy brother!

Sickness yielded at length, however, to youth and medical skill. Alfieri was restored to health. Two



years afterwards he had to undergo another trial. His sister, to whom he was much attached, was to be taken from him in order that she might go to a convent and complete her education. His elder brother and his other sisters had already been sent away in succession to Turin. He was now to lose his last remaining play-mate. The pain of separation affected the child acutely : he shed bitter tears at parting with his much-loved sister, and for some time could only be pacified by being allowed to visit the convent every day, to see her and talk with her. Fortunately, occupations were provided for him about this time which soon softened his grief. He was placed under the guidance of a teacher, a priest named Ivaldi, in order to enter upon the studies which were to fit him for the social position he had to occupy. The good priest was not remarkable for learning, as even his young pupil soon discovered ; but he had enough to satisfy the parents of the lad he was engaged to teach. Although of high family, they were without much education, and did not wish, in this respect, their son to be very dissimilar. A noble ought not to be a doctor, was the aristocratic maxim they clung to ; and Alfieri stood in little danger of detaching them from it, while he remained in the hands of the worthy Ivaldi.

Even at this early period the feelings of the lad began to develop themselves in a morbid manner. Left much alone, after the departure of his sister, his mind became filled with melancholy, which his studies, although pursued with willingness and aptitude, could not lighten. When under the influence of this feeling he was fond of visiting a neighbouring church, that of the Carmelites,—it is pulled down now, and on a portion of its site arises an hospital for invalid soldiers,—of listening to the music he heard there, and of gazing upon the religious ceremo-

nies that took place. For the young boys who assisted in these ceremonies he conceived an affection almost similar to that he had borne his sister, and which consoled him for her loss. He looked upon these lads as beings of angelic purity — beings belonging to a higher sphere than that in which he lived. He carried his affection so far that it absorbed after a time every other thought. He neglected his studies; he fled the society of his parents and teacher; he was never happy except when at church with the young priests before his eyes. He could not endure to listen to a syllable against them, or the profession they were following. Having heard the word “monk” sometimes used as a term of disdain, he erased it from his Italian and Latin dictionaries, and substituted in its place “father,” which he found was regarded as a synonym of respect and affection. He thought that in acting thus he indemnified his young friends, in as far as he could, for the insults to which they were subjected!

His melancholy, despite this strange affection,—which was, indeed, perhaps but a result of it,—would frequently manifest itself, and subjugate for a time every other feeling. One day, when he was still only seven or eight years old, he felt himself more than usually oppressed by it. He had heard that a plant existed, called hemlock, which if eaten would cause death. Beneath his window was a little garden in which a number of flowers were growing. He thought that one of these might perhaps be the deadly plant; and in the hope that it would prove so, although he had no real wish to die, he gathered a number of the flowers, and ate of them with avidity. Fortunately there was no hemlock amongst them; but, nevertheless, those he had eaten were sufficiently bitter and nasty to render him really ill. He returned into

the house, his lips discoloured, his face pale. He could not partake of his dinner. His mother was alarmed. She saw that he was suffering, and pressed him to tell her the cause. For a long time he refused; but as his face grew more and more pallid, she increased her entreaties, and at last he burst into tears and confessed the truth. A few light remedies were applied, and he soon recovered. But the punishment he received only tended to augment the mental malady which had led him to commit so wild an act. He was confined in his room for several days; and there amid solitude by day, darkness by night, and strange moody thoughts at all times, his melancholy threw out fresh branches and took deeper root in his disposition.

## CHAP. II.

## ANECDOTES OF EARLY LIFE.

THERE were other little incidents that occurred about the same time which serve to illustrate the peculiar formation of Alfieri's disposition. They are trivial perhaps; but, in the beginning, are not all things so? The bud has a very insignificant appearance, but out of it comes the full-grown flower. Alfieri was accustomed at night to wear a little net cap. For some fault he had committed, his mother compelled him to go to church with this covering upon his head. There was nothing grotesque or ridiculous in its aspect, as in the ordinary nightcaps of a more northern clime. It was of a green colour, very well made, and resembled those worn as ornaments by the dandies of Andalusia. But he looked upon his punishment as the most humiliating and painful that could be inflicted. He was dragged rather than led through the streets, sobbing and screaming while he passed through the unfrequented places, and holding his head down in bitter shame and silence when he reached the less deserted thoroughfares. Arrived at the church, he shut his eyes, and was conducted thus to his seat. He thought that all looks, but especially those of the young priests, were directed towards him, and he never once dared to raise his own. When the service was over he was taken home in the same manner as he had



been brought, his agony increasing at every step. He believed himself dishonoured for ever! He could not eat, or speak, or study; even the relief of tears was denied; and the effect upon him was such that for several days he remained seriously ill. He had been punished once before in this way, and with such good effect, that for three months afterwards he had not given a single cause of complaint. But this second trial was found to be too great for his endurance. The punishment was never again repeated.

Another incident which occurred at about this time serves as an additional illustration of his disposition. When between seven and eight years of age he was instructed how to make confession of his sins. The little fellow was so ignorant of sin, that it was found necessary to suggest to him such as he might have committed, the very names of which he knew not. When in the presence of the priest, his repugnance to disclose his inmost secrets was so great that he could scarcely utter a word. Nevertheless, what he said, and what was said for him, were thought satisfactory, and he was granted absolution. As an additional penance, however, he was told publicly to ask pardon for his transgressions, of his mother, when he arrived at home. He had no objection to humble himself before his mother, but to do so in presence of the whole household was a punishment he could not submit to. When she indicated by signs that she wished him to act as he had been directed (she had concocted this plan with the priest), he remained silent and motionless. To have stated explicitly that she required the penance, would have been to admit that she was acquainted with what had taken place at the confessional; she said nothing therefore. Alfieri lost that day's dinner; but he gained something he valued

even more highly : no further penances were required of him.

It was not an easy task to keep Alfieri under control, especially for those who could not read his disposition sufficiently clearly to see, and then to profit by, the good qualities it contained. He had feelings not very different perhaps from those of other children, but they were stronger than is customary at his age. He was always in extremes : now taciturn and tranquil, now talkative and boisterous ; very submissive under kindness, but a hardened rebel against every attempt to rule him by force ; fearing censure above all things ; generally of an excessive timidity, but rendered inflexible the moment he believed himself aggrieved, or when roused by constraint.

He gave an example of determination upon the occasion of a visit paid to his mother by one of her relatives, a rich and distinguished widow of Turin. Just before her departure, wishing to make him a present, she asked him to name that with which he would be most pleased. Shame, timidity, and irresolution held him silent in the first place ; obstinacy and annoyance kept him so afterwards. To the inquiry the lady addressed to him again and again, he would give but one unvarying answer,—“Nothing.” It was in vain that the question was repeated to him by others ; no word more gracious would pass his lips. He sobbed, he cried, his voice was broken ; but he would not yield. Finally, he was driven away to his chamber, to repent at leisure of the bad behaviour he had displayed.

There was, however, a stronger motive for this refusal than Alfieri gives himself credit for. A few days before, he had taken from one of the boxes of the lady who offered him the present, a fan, which, hidden in his bed, he intended to give his sister. After he had been guilty

of this theft, could he have accepted a gift from the person he had robbed? Gratitude must have compelled him, had he done so, to confess his fault; and he preferred to commit a second, rather than incur the shame with which he must have been covered by a disclosure of the first. As might be expected, such conduct brought a double retribution: he was punished for refusing the present; and when his petty theft was discovered, he received another punishment for that offence. The second correction was not without good fruits: he never afterwards broke the Eighth Commandment.

When he was about eight years of age, his elder brother came home for a holiday from the college at Turin to which he had been sent. He was six years older than Alfieri; more advanced in study, generally more important than his younger brother, and became at once an object of envy and of pleasure in that brother's eyes. Alfieri's envy was not, however, of a mean description: it did not lead him to hate the person against whom it was directed; it made him ardently desire to possess the same advantages as his brother, but not to deprive him of them. His mind was too generous to be swayed by any but generous feelings; and envy of this kind was assuredly born of none other. Despite the difference in age between the two brothers, they passed the time very happily which they spent in each other's society. Alfieri's melancholy disappeared when it was brought face to face with the joyous emotion of a boy fresh from the restraints of school. Instead of sitting silent and alone, enslaved by gloomy thoughts, he joined in the amusements suited to his age, and grew for the time full of life and vivacity. It seemed, however, as though Fate were jealous of the happy change that had come over his spirit, and that it was determined

to drive him back again into the solitude of his chamber. One day when, with boyish eagerness, he was simulating the soldier, and going through a military exercise under the superintendence of his brother, he lost his balance by turning too quickly, and fell upon the iron bar or "dog" of the fireplace. Unfortunately, the brass knob with which such bars are usually surmounted was broken off: the end was jagged and sharp. It entered his forehead just above the left eye. For some time he experienced no pain, except a feeling of shame at his want of skill; and he begged his brother not to say a word of the circumstance. But his brother, in alarm, ran hastily for assistance. Alfieri had uttered no sound, and did not know he was injured. Feeling something warm upon his cheek, he put his hand there; when he withdrew it, it was covered with blood. It was his turn now to be terrified, and his cries soon lent speed to those who were coming to aid him. A surgeon was called, who dressed the wound. For days, however, the discomfited little soldier was kept in a dark chamber. His eye had become inflamed and swollen; it was feared he might lose the sight of it. It was not until several weeks had passed that the wound was completely healed. A scar was then left by it, which he bore ever afterwards.

While recovering from this accident, another point of his character—his love of admiration—was amusingly shown. He had almost died of grief, as we have seen, in being compelled to wear a pretty little cap, which was too unpretending to attract the slightest attention, but which, in his fear and shame, he thought a conspicuous object that everybody would observe. Now that his head was covered with bandages, which at once provoked inquiry and remark, besides disfiguring his appearance, he felt not the slightest annoyance. He

was even pleased with the effect he created, and was proud of his wound. He thought that to have suffered so much, was in some sort meritorious; that his bruise, which he at first regarded as a disgrace, was a distinction. Whenever his teacher, in reply to the questions of friends, stated that a "fall" had caused the wound, Alfieri was sure to add that it was a fall which happened while exercising.

About a year after this accident, his brother fell ill at college, and was brought home. Before his arrival, Alfieri was sent away into the country. While there, his uncle, Pelligrino Alfieri, who was also his guardian, came to see him, found that he had made but little progress in education, and proposed that he should go to college at Turin. The proposal was assented to by the parents of Alfieri, and he prepared to set out. Just before departing, his brother died.

It was a painful separation between mother and son after such an event. The mother had just lost one child; who could tell if she might not now be parting for ever from the other? It was a moment to give encouragement to such a sorrowful thought. The boy was much moved; and when to the pain of this adieu there was added that of leaving his old teacher, whom he much loved, his spirit fairly gave way, and he was removed almost by force into the calèche. But if childish grief were of long duration, who amongst us would have arrived at man's estate? If the sorrow that smote us so violently in childhood had outlived the hour which gave it birth, who amongst us could have survived its bitter, bitter pang?

Alfieri had never before been more than fifteen miles from home; he had never travelled in vehicle more commodious than a country chaise, never at swifter pace

than that of the two sedate and leisurely bullocks who drew it; now he was in a post-chaise, hurried along by dashing and spirited horses, and going upon an unfamiliar journey. What new scenes flew past him while, with boyish enthusiasm, he urged the postilions forward, feeling every vein throbbing with excitement as the swift air dashed against his cheek, and his eyes glistened with delight! What strange sights he was to look upon in the city to which he was flying! What a happy life he would lead in his new home! What studies he would engage in! What learning he would acquire! What honours he would gain! What friends he would make! Of a truth he was too much occupied to think of sorrow, or of the dear mother and kind friends he had left behind him.



## CHAP. III.

## COLLEGE LIFE IN TURIN.

It was in the month of June, 1758, that Alfieri arrived in Turin. He had then passed his ninth year by about six months. October was the time at which he was to enter college; but his uncle, tired of him before that date, sent him on the 1st of August. It was undoubtedly the wisest course he could adopt. The young lad, melancholy at first upon finding himself among strange faces in a strange city, had soon recovered his spirits. Indeed, pleased with the novelty of everything he saw around him, he became more vivacious than he had ever been. He had no teacher, and felt no desire to have one. He passed his days in the active enjoyments of boyhood, and introduced such disorder into the household of his uncle, that the worthy man was not sorry to be rid of him before the proper time.

The Academy of Turin, to which Alfieri was sent, was not an establishment in which glorious dreams of honour or happiness were likely to find realisation. It was a large building, running round the four sides of an extensive square court. Two sides of the edifice were occupied by students, the third contained the archives of the king, and the fourth was the Theatre Royal. The latter edifice was from the design of a cousin of Alfieri, Benedetto Alfieri, architect to the king. The students were

divided into three classes. The first were adult young men, many of whom studied also at the neighbouring university. They were nearly all foreigners, and possessed several privileges denied to the other pupils. They were under easy rule; they went to the theatre or the court as often as they pleased; they frequented the society most to their tastes: the Academy was, in fact, more like an inn to them than a place of education.

The students of the second and third classes were very differently placed. They were compelled to rise early and to go to bed early; to follow a regular course of study: they were not allowed to go into the town; they were not allowed to visit the theatre, except two or three times during the Carnival. These restraints, proper doubtless for young students, were rendered peculiarly disagreeable by bad arrangements. Two or three times a day the pupils of the second and third classes were obliged to pass through the gallery of the first class, and could not avoid seeing the liberty enjoyed there. Their own restraint appeared slavery by comparison. Indeed, they called themselves "galley-slaves," and looked almost with the stubborn discontentment of felons upon their more fortunate companions.

To add to their annoyance the young pages of the king were lodged in the college, and led a life that poor cooped-up schoolboys might well have envied. Every day in the grand chambers of the palace, assisting at courtly ceremonials, attending hunting excursions, forming part of glittering cavalcades, their existence was a constant movement among ever-changing scenes of pleasure and display.

Unfortunately the system of education pursued at the Academy was not, if we may credit Alfieri's account,—and it has somewhat an exaggerated air,—of a kind likely to

make the young pupils rise superior to these annoyances. Soon after his admission, Alfieri was placed in the third class, which he declares would in any college under better direction have made a very bad fourth. "We translated the Lives of Cornelius Nepos," he says, "but none of us—perhaps not even the master himself—knew who were the men whose lives we translated, in what countries they were born; at what period and under what governments they had lived; nor, indeed, what the word government meant. All our ideas were limited, false, or obscure. There was no aim for those who taught; no attraction for those who learnt."

A year elapsed in this profitless manner, and then Alfieri passed under the hands of another master in order to commence his classical studies. He had a better instructor than before, and made more progress, becoming in a short time tolerably familiar with the Latin language. He was incited to study, too, by one of his fellow pupils, who became in some sort his rival in the school. This lad had a good memory: he could recite six hundred verses of Virgil without a single pause or error. Alfieri never could get beyond four hundred. His incapacity in this respect filled him at times with rage that was almost ungovernable; but on the whole the effect upon him of the competition with his companion was useful. The sense of inferiority did not, as in so many cases, take away energy, but gave fresh power. How many delicate minds the rivalry of a public school has crushed rather than expanded! For the one which rises there are ten probably which fall.

But while Alfieri made an advance in one direction, he may be said to have receded in another. The little knowledge he possessed of Italian, which had the best claim perhaps to be regarded as his native tongue, dimin-

ished every day. When a volume of Ariosto fell into his hands, half of it he found unintelligible. He could translate Virgil into Italian prose, but the easiest of Italian poetry was almost a dead letter to him.

The manner in which he became possessed of Ariosto was amusing. It was in the hands of one of his school-fellows. Alfieri wished to obtain it; but he had no money with which to make the purchase. Trading, however, was invented before cash. If he could not buy, he could barter. His Sunday's dinner was property easily transferable, and admirably adapted as a medium of exchange. Consisting of half a fowl, a tempting luxury not supplied on other days, it was a meal looked forward to every week with much interest by the pupils who partook of it. It had a high value in their eyes. Ariosto, when placed by its side, showed to very little advantage. He was willingly sacrificed for four dinners!

Alfieri did not long enjoy the property he had thus acquired. His mind was not compensated for the loss his stomach had sustained. The book was seen to be circulating cautiously from hand to hand, and was seized by the master. He confiscated it at once as contraband reading. Alfieri regained it shortly afterwards, but without being able to extract even amusement from its pages.

The Academy of Turin was even more unfavourable to Alfieri's bodily powers than to his mind. Under the eyes of his mother, he had been accustomed to the most tender cares, and had been of course well nourished. Now that he was away from home he was left almost to himself, and but poorly fed. His health gave way. An unpleasant eruption broke out upon him, covering his head with the most offensive sores. He was continually subject to violent headaches; he slept

but little at night ; his skin, diseased and discoloured, several times peeled off from his forehead ; his growth was stopped, and he became miserably pale and thin.

It was fortunate for him that he had relations in the city whom he could visit from time to time, and from whom he could obtain some sympathy. Among his fellow pupils he found none. Instead of pitying the affliction of the poor lad, they made it an object of merriment. He became sport and amusement to them. He was a sort of human humming top, to be lashed by the cord of everybody's wit. The least offensive called him "the Carrion ;" others, not quite so refined or so humane, gave him the more disagreeable title of "the Rotten." He was not of a nature to be so treated without feeling very deeply. To add to his unhappiness, the servant who had been sent with him from home ill-used him, and robbed him of the money intended for his use. He was a petty tyrant to the poor boy, that servant ! "He had the mind of a prince," says Alfieri, in a passage omitted from all the early editions of his "Memoirs ;" and he adds sarcastically, "of a prince such as we see in these days." Unfortunately Alfieri's illness so weakened him that he had not strength enough to resent this bad treatment. Neither had he spirit to reply to the coarse words of his companions. He was forced to endure every unfeeling gibe and jest in silence, or withdraw into the solitude of his chamber. There, with no companion but his sorrowful thoughts, his old childish melancholy seized upon him again, and grew stronger as his health grew feebler and his state more lonely.

## CHAP. IV.

## MORE OF COLLEGE LIFE.

NOTWITHSTANDING his illness and the enervation of mind his melancholy produced, Alfieri entered upon a course of rhetoric, and successfully passed his examination in that art after a year of study. This over, he was deemed sufficiently far advanced for promotion to the second class. It was a flattering elevation for a pupil who was only then in his thirteenth year, and it brought with it many agreeable changes. Twice a day he attended lessons at the university. The walk to and fro was a pleasant diversion; and it very often afforded opportunities for others, stealthily taken, that were more so. His education did not, however, advance much more in this class than in the one he had just left. In the morning he studied geometry; after dinner, philosophy. By dint of mere memory, he succeeded in maintaining a fair position in these classes, but the real knowledge he acquired there seems to have been very trifling. He confesses that his head was anti-geometric, and that in Euclid he never understood even the fourth proposition. As for his philosophical studies, the manner in which they were conducted was such that little hope of progress was afforded to the pupils. The lessons commenced directly after dinner. During the first half hour an exercise was dictated by the professor. An explanation



in Latin, lasting three-quarters of an hour, succeeded. The students kept awake while writing the exercise; but when the explanations commenced, the effect was too soporific to be struggled against. One by one, they fell into a sound and refreshing sleep,—their varied snorings affording an agreeable relief to the monotony of the professor's tones.

Want of sleep was one of the causes of Alfieri's illness. This had become so evident to the college authorities, that they allowed him to remain in bed until seven o'clock in the morning, instead of rising at a quarter to six, as was the custom. The change was of great benefit to him. The regular after-dinner nap did him equal service. During the year he attended the lessons of the professor of philosophy he grew better in health day by day; and an improvement in his food, obtained by the efforts of his uncle, continued to reestablish him. His cousin, the architect, whom he also called his uncle, assisted in this object. He saw that a little more freedom and relaxation would benefit Alfieri quite as much as an improved diet or medical skill. From time to time he invited the young academician to his house, made him stay to dinner, and sometimes took him to the theatre. This last favour could only be obtained by an evasion of the college rules. According to those rules, Alfieri was bound to return to the Academy half an hour after sunset. But his uncle urged ill-health as a reason why the lad should occasionally sleep in the country, and taking advantage of the permission thus obtained, carried him away to the theatre. Alfieri's delight at witnessing a dramatic representation for the first time, was, like that of most lads, extravagant in its intensity. The piece was an opera. It was by a celebrated composer, and was well sung. The effect upon him was most

moving. His whole frame was stirred. For days afterwards the music seemed to be whispering in his ears, and at last so agitated him, that a feeling of gentle melancholy stole into his mind, in the midst of which a thousand fancies arose, and seemed sighing to express themselves in words. Nor was he thus moved only after his first visit. He could never listen to an opera in after years without feeling powerfully excited. The plans of all his tragedies, he tells us, were made either while listening to music, or a few hours afterwards.

The time had not yet come when the power of expressing his thoughts was at his command. About a year after his first visit to the theatre, he wrote a sonnet; but his uncle, to whom he showed it, giving him no encouragement to proceed, his poetic inclinations instantly disappeared. It was many years before they again displayed themselves.

His studies, meanwhile, continued. The course of philosophy at an end, he entered upon one of physics, under Beccaria, and upon one of ethics. He shone, he tells us, at the examinations by mere memory, but knew nothing of what he had learnt. Towards the end of his fourth year at the Academy he commenced the study of civil and canonical law, but was soon stopped by an illness similar to that he had previously had, but more violent. This time he was obliged to part with all his hair. That, however, was not his only annoyance. He was compelled to wear a wig. Such an ornament was, of course, a source of infinite amusement to a troop of grinning schoolboys. It became the favourite toy of the playground, and threatened for a time to supersede all others. But Alfieri had grown stronger in mind and body since his previous attack. Instead of allowing the boisterous merriment of his playmates to subdue him into melan-

choly, he joined heartily in their sport. He gave up at once all attempt to defend his head-dress, was the first to take it off and throw it into the air, or to pitch it at his companions, and had the satisfaction of finding that in a few days it ceased to attract attention or ridicule. The unhappy wig, thus roughly treated by its owner, became in time as much respected and as little molested as his own natural hair would have been. He learnt a lesson from the circumstance, which he felt was applicable in a more extensive school. Throughout his life he never forgot the teaching of that wig.

In the midst of his legal studies, he received instruction in music, dancing, fencing, and geography. With the latter he succeeded tolerably well; but neither fencing nor dancing were to his taste, and music wearied him when he ceased to be other than a listener. He found more amusement in *Gil Blas*, which fell into his hands at this time, and in various Italian romances, which he read with avidity.

He had attained his fourteenth year, when his uncle, who had become Viceroy of Sardinia, died at Cagliari. This event made a great change in the position of Alfieri. He had now arrived at an age when, according to the Piedmontese law, he was master of his own revenues. The power of disposing of his property was withheld from him, and the administration of his affairs was placed in the hands of a trustee; but he had plenty of money at his disposal, much more than was good for one so young. The first desire which his altered circumstances gave rise to, was that of learning to ride. He was promised that this wish should be gratified if he passed his examination for a doctorship. He put himself immediately under the guidance of a private tutor; went hastily over the subjects upon which he was

to be questioned ; stored himself with the necessary Latin for the occasion ; and in less than a month became, almost without knowing how, matriculated Master of Arts.

The horse exercise then commenced. His progress at the riding school was as rapid as at the college. In a very short time he was able to handle a bridle with the skill of a groom, and to sit his beast with the firmness of a jockey. He was still small, thin, and feeble ; but as day by day he followed his new amusement, his strength increased and his appearance improved. With greater bodily force, he grew bolder. He did not scruple to tell the college authorities that the study of law wearied him, and that he would not continue it any longer. They debated some little time, and at length agreed to release him from that study and to promote him to the first class.

He entered into that famous part of the Academy on the 8th of May, 1763, while he was still only at the commencement of his fourteenth year. He was now quite free in his movements, unrestrained by studies of any kind. He commenced leading a life of display and indolence. He spent large sums in showy clothes ; he rode out each day ; he made a number of new acquaintances ; he fared sumptuously : his life was one round of enjoyment and dissipation. From time to time remorse visited him as he thought of the studies he was neglecting ; and a feeling of shame would now and then flush his cheek, as his ignorance came like a mocking spirit to taunt him in the midst of his gaiety. He had too, at intervals, a strong desire to increase his knowledge, to clarify the pool of information that was lying stagnant and thickening in his brain. So completely did this desire prevail, upon one occasion, over every other, that, for want of more congenial occupation, he devoted himself for

two months to the study of thirty-six large volumes upon ecclesiastical history! Study, undertaken without object, was, of course, productive of no good result. By the time the last volume was finished, he knew scarcely more of the work than before he commenced reading it, and returned to his pleasures with increased zest.

Youth and wealth seemed determined for a time to lead Alfieri into excesses. He became intimate with a number of young madcaps as fond of horsemanship as himself. Every day they risked their necks in the wildest and most absurd feats. Sometimes they would gallop at full speed down the road which leads from the Hermitage of the Camaldolesi to Turin. It was then, as now, very steep and paved with rough flint stones; a single false step would have been instant death! At other times, Alfieri's servant would be sent on in advance, and the whole party would follow with loud cries and shouts, chasing him like a fox or stag. Ditches were leaped over in these hunting excursions, and rivers were crossed, with a recklessness that threatened as much danger to steed as to rider. In a short time, indeed, not a person in Turin could be found to lend horses to the young men at any price whatever, so great was the reputation they had acquired by their wild acts.

## CHAP. V.

## YOUTHFUL TASTES.

ALFIERI had been elevated to the first class a little earlier than customary, and in consequence had not been allowed the perfect liberty enjoyed by the other students. A valet was found for him, his previous servant having been dismissed, and he was not permitted to go out except in that valet's company. This restraint, which a few months before would have been gladly borne, and which was rendered justifiable by his extreme youth, became in a short time so unendurable that he determined to set himself free from it. He went out alone. He was reprimanded in the first place, but as he persisted he was placed under arrest, kept close prisoner in his bedroom. Liberty being restored to him, he again infringed, and was again punished. This time his confinement was particularly irksome. It was Carnival. All Turin was a scene of gaiety; all his friends were plunged deep in amusement. But he would not make any concession or promise to alter his conduct, in order to be released. On the contrary, he persisted in asserting his right to the privilege he claimed. He declared that if he were too young for the first class, he ought to be sent back into the second; but that so long as he was kept in the first, he would put himself on the footing of the other students. These arguments, however, had



very little weight with the authorities. They allowed him to play the martyr for three months. During this time the opposition in which he was engaged took such a hold upon his feelings, that his manners underwent a complete change. He neglected his dress, he would scarcely eat anything, he would not talk to the friends who came to see him. He remained all day upon his mattress like a form without life, his eyes fixed upon the ceiling and filled with tears, but no drop ever falling from beneath their lashes.

Fortunately, the marriage of his sister put an end to this confinement. She used the influence of her husband in order to obtain the liberation of the hot-headed young student, and to gain the privilege claimed. Both the one and the other were granted.

Released from the prison in which he had been so long kept, and without any check now upon his liberty, he entered again upon a life of indolence and display. His fondness for horses having grown rather than diminished, nothing would satisfy him but keeping a stud of his own. He bought, therefore, a very beautiful horse, and for some time it was the constant object of his thoughts. His passion for it was so great that it even troubled his sleep, and took away his appetite. His mind was always tortured at the slightest evidence of discomfort the animal displayed, yet he did not spare the whip when caprice suggested that it should be used. One horse did not long satisfy him. That which he had bought was for the saddle, but was so delicate that another became necessary. Two for carriage work were of course indispensable. Others were added afterwards, so that in about a year he had eight horses in his possession. It was in vain that the trustee of his property cried out against these expenses; Alfieri was his own master, and meant to

show it. He had plenty of money ; he was determined to spend it as he liked.

The life which he now led was one which might have thoroughly corrupted the spirit of most young men in a similar position. It was so idle and unproductive that we may well believe him, when he says in a letter to his sister, written years after, that very little recollection of the period remained in his memory. In the midst of all his follies, however, he maintained a certain loftiness of mind, which preserved him from that inflated arrogance, that impious pride of blood, which so frequently accompanies wealth and aristocracy, and which would render them hateful, if it did not render them absurd. Knowing no limits to his rivalry of such of his companions as were in as good or better circumstances than himself, he was careful at all times to show no ostentation of this kind towards those who were less fortunately situated. He treated them with a delicacy that evinced something akin to true nobility of nature. After wearing a glittering and expensive coat in the morning at the Court, or among his wealthy friends, he would change it when he went among those of different fortune. It seemed a crime to him to display finery before his associates and equals which they could not possess. His horses he did not keep exclusively to himself. They were always at the service of his friends. His coach too, a very elegant one, he gave up entirely, when he found that none of his companions could afford such a luxury.

A life such as his would have been faithless to its ordinary character, however, had it not led his mind to some extent astray. Just before paying a visit to Genoa he accompanied two friends into the country, and fell in love with their sister, who was introduced to him there. She was a young brunette, full of vivacity and fascination.

But there were two great obstacles to the success of his passion. The lady was just married, and she was most faithfully guarded not only by her brothers, but by her husband. Alfieri was obliged, therefore, to conceal his affection, or allow it to escape from him in sighs and tears that solitude alone was witness to. Yet the memory of his first love sank deep into his mind; and, years after, he says, would arise to feed that flame which smoulders, but is never thoroughly extinguished.

Returned from Genoa, full of the sights he had witnessed there, regarding his journey as a great achievement, he thought himself entitled to talk as a traveller who has seen a distant country. But among his fellow-students at the Academy were a number of young men from England, from Germany, from Poland, even from Russia. These wanderers naturally looked upon a journey to Genoa as a very insignificant affair, and Alfieri at once felt himself shorn of all his plumes. A desire to extend the range of his travelling experience from that time seized upon him. Nothing would satisfy him but a visit to the countries from which his companions had come. He determined on the first opportunity to set out.

Soon after entering the first class of the college, he had asked for employment in the army. He had been named ensign in a regiment of militia, and had entered upon his duties. They were very insignificant, necessitating only two short absences from the Academy in the year. But he could not endure the restraint which military discipline imposed upon him, slight though it might be. The dislike for a soldier's life grew stronger within him as his desire to travel increased.

He was only seventeen years of age, however, and it was not probable that at such years he would be per-

mitted to travel alone. He looked about to see beneath whose guidance he could place himself. An English teacher had under his charge two pupils who had been studying at the Academy. All three were about to set out on a journey through Italy. Alfieri introduced himself to this teacher, and, by dint of flattering him and his pupils, obtained permission to join the party. A higher permission was still required,—that of the king. It was not easy to obtain, for the monarch objected very much to the migrations of his nobles. Alfieri's brother-in-law, who held a place at the Court, was fortunate enough, however, to gain over the royal favour; and the boy-traveller set out for Milan with his three companions.

The journey, commenced with delight, and after a night of restless anxiety, offered Alfieri very little gratification when completed. Milan seemed dull to him, as indeed to most people, after having seen Genoa. He took no interest in the literary treasures displayed there; and when an autograph manuscript of Petrarch was shown him, returned it after a momentary glance of supreme indifference. He had taken a hatred against everything Italian. He would not speak the language, he would not read the literature. All his correspondence, all his conversation, was in French. He wished to be thought a native of France.

After a stay of a fortnight in Milan, the travellers continued their journey, passed by Parma, Modena, and Bologna to Florence. There they stopped a month. Alfieri was not in a mood to stop long anywhere. His sole pleasure was to be in motion, to post rapidly from town to town, to glance hurriedly around him, and then advance to some other point. Pictures, sculpture, buildings, people, were all alike indifferent to him. He had a feverish desire to go forward, which increased the more

it was indulged. The only object which attracted him at Florence, was the tomb of Michael Angelo in the church of Santa Croce. Before that he stopped, stimulated for a moment by a feeling of reverence for genius, and by a conviction that only the truly great, leave imperishable monuments behind them.

Rome was reached in due time, but its beauties did not afford much interest to Alfieri. St. Peter's he was struck with, and rarely passed a day without visiting it once or twice. But it was the only object which had this influence. All the other famous features of the Papal city he scanned almost at a glance. In little more than a week he had seen enough of everything, and hurried his companions away to Naples. Arrived there in the midst of the Carnival, he was pleased for a time with the place and with the amusements in which it abounded. He went to the opera, to the balls; he was presented to the king, he was introduced to the best society; but he was soon wearied and disgusted with everything around him. In the midst of all the excitement and brilliancy in which he moved, a thousand melancholy ideas seized upon him, and drove him into solitude. He had not been many days at Naples before he was anxious to start in another direction. He began to be tired, too, of the restraint his companions imposed upon him. He wished to be entirely master of his movements, and to travel alone. Some little diplomacy was needed in order to obtain the necessary permission. He introduced himself, therefore, to the Piedmontese Minister at the Court of Naples. He begged the official to write in his favour to Turin. His request was complied with. The consent of the king soon followed.

Free now to travel where he pleased, without consulting or conforming to the wishes of others, he made use

of his newly gained liberty at once. So that he was in movement, he cared little where he went. His steps directed themselves towards Rome again. Rome, however, satisfied him no more this time than on the previous occasion. He was no sooner within its walls, than he felt anxious to hurry elsewhere. His desires took now a wider range. Nothing less than a journey to France, England, and Holland, would content him. Fresh permission was necessary before he could undertake this. He used means to obtain it, similar to those he had before exerted, and with the same success. He was free to travel at his will during the whole of the following year, 1768. A varied panorama is about to pass before his eyes; let us see with what attention he will regard it.



## CHAP. VI.

## WANDERINGS.

ALFIERI set out in a strange mood. The trustee of his property had made him a certain yearly allowance, and plainly intimated that he did not mean to exceed it. Alfieri had heard much of the dearness of living in the countries he was going to: he was afraid he should not have enough money. He did not dare to write, insisting upon an increased sum; for he was afraid his trustee might complain to the king, representing him as a young prodigal, and that the king might adopt unpleasant measures in consequence. The monarch of Piedmont was, he knew, accustomed to take a lively interest in the private affairs of his nobles. He determined, therefore, simply to curtail his expenditure within the smallest possible limits. He carried out this at first in the true spirit of a miser. For some time before leaving Rome he ceased to visit any of its attractions which necessitated payment. He fed his servant so badly too, that the poor fellow was compelled to declare he must steal in order to live. Alfieri grew more generous at this, but against his will. When he commenced his journey, he hired mules instead of dashing along, as formerly, by post; but the pace of these animals was so slow, his patience grew so thoroughly worn out, that in a few days he returned to his old mode of travelling, quite

cured of his avaricious fit, resolved henceforth to practise an orderly but not a penurious economy.

His journey was just as unsatisfactory to Alfieri as before. No spot that he stopped at awakened his attention or excited his interest. He passed through Loretto without feeling devotional, and visited Ferrara without remembering that it was the birth-place and tomb of Ariosto. Arrived at Venice, he was delighted for a day or two with the singular aspect of that city; but delight wearing away, his old melancholy returned to imprison mind and body in an apathy almost degrading. After having glanced at a few of the beauties around him, he lost all desire to see more. For days he had not energy enough to stir from his chamber, but passed the whole time listlessly looking from his window, or weeping bitterly without object and without cause. Not one tenth of the marvels in painting, architecture, and sculpture, which formed the glory of the city, did he even look at: he had no desire to see them. He had only the desire of hurrying away in pursuit of the phantom he was always seeking.

From Venice he went to Padua, without knowing that it was the last resting-place of Petrarch, and in no mood to profit by the knowledge had it reached him. From Padua to Genoa, after stopping at Verona, Mantua, and Milan. Genoa, that city of marvellous beauty, which had pleased him so much a year or two before, now offered him but little attraction. He had letters of introduction to many of the inhabitants, but he did not present them; or if he did, shunned the intimacies they seemed likely to lead to. Although fond of strange places, strange people were his abhorrence.

Genoa was soon left far behind, and he was hastening away for France. He had a great desire to see that

country: the glowing accounts he had heard of it had inflamed his imagination; he wanted to look upon Paris, the centre of continental civilisation, the city of art and beauty; he wanted too, above all, to make acquaintance with the French stage, not because he felt any desire towards dramatic writing, but because he had seen French pieces well played in Piedmont, and was very desirous to see others of the same kind.

Arrived at Marseilles, his chief sources of amusement were the theatre and the sea-shore. Day after day he sat in the cavity of a rock where he was concealed from view, and, with nothing before him but the sea and the sky, gave himself up to strange reveries. Poetry was already filling his heart, but the time had not yet come when it was to overflow in words.

Bright, joyous, sunny Marseilles soon became insupportably wearying, and he started away for Paris. Travelling was not quite so rapid in those days as in our own: there was plenty of time to stop at the various towns upon the line of route from the Mediterranean to the French capital. But Alfieri's only desire was to reach the end of his journey as soon as possible. Aix with its splendid promenade, Avignon with its tomb of Laura, Vaucluse with its memories of Petrarch, failed to stay his movements for an instant. On—on he went, night and day, to Paris, as though he were flying from the vengeance of man or the wrath of God.

His disappointment with Paris was greater than any which his travelling experiences had yet brought him. He arrived in the middle of August, a time when the city is generally seen under one of its most charming aspects; but it offered no attraction to his eyes. He describes it as a "filthy sewer;" the Faubourg St. Germain, where he lodged, as a fetid and muddy tomb.

The architecture of the place he found pitiful and barbarous, the churches dirty, the palaces contemptible, the theatres ill-shaped, the women painted and ugly! Above all, the atmosphere was unendurable: thick fogs, such as he had never seen before, constantly hovered over the unhappy city. For fifteen days he never saw the sun! And this in Paris, the glory of France, the envy of despairing England! The imaginary London of French romantic literature was never painted in darker colours!

So great was Alfieri's disgust, that his first intention was to depart immediately. Withheld, however, by shame and fatigue, he remained a few months, wearying himself with indolent amusements which gave him no enjoyment. The Piedmontese Minister presented him to Louis XV., and introduced him to diplomatic circles. He went to the theatre, he strolled upon the promenades, but nothing satisfied him. A little cured of the desire to travel, he was yet anxious to see England, about which he had heard so much, and towards which early prejudices had made him more favourable than towards France. He crossed the Channel, therefore, at the commencement of January, 1768.

England pleased him highly: he was delighted at once with the roads, the inns, the horses, the people, the life of activity, the cleanliness and comfort of the houses, the perpetual movements of industry, and the absence of poverty! In an excursion that he made to Bath, Portsmouth, Bristol, Salisbury, and Oxford, his favourable opinion augmented. The country delighted him. He had for a time the desire to settle there for ever. He forgot the unpleasantness of the climate, the melancholy which it gave rise to, and the expense of living; so pleased was he with the scenery, the simple manners of the people, the beauty and modesty of the women he

met with, and the real liberty which everybody enjoyed. His admiration did not cease with a more intimate acquaintance: years afterwards, when his knowledge of the country had increased, and he had travelled over all Europe, he declared that the lands he should most like to inhabit were Italy and England: the latter, because it had changed and subjugated nature by art; the former, because nature always maintained herself there full of strength and vigour, in spite of the restraint in which she was kept by governments always idle and sometimes bad.

With London he was equally pleased: he found the society less fettered and more to his taste than that of Paris. He entered into it with animation, for some time passing his days in a round of fashionable pleasures. These beginning to weary him, he indulged in others less refined. He played coachman to himself and a friend who had accompanied him from the Continent. Mounted upon his box, he drove this friend to fashionable parties, to the theatres, or to Ranelagh, waited patiently for him until he came out, and then drove him home. He became so skilful in this employment, that he safely guided his vehicle through the most crowded thoroughfares, through all danger, without ever receiving or inflicting injury. During a considerable portion of his stay in London, this occupation and horse-riding were his sole amusements. One might almost have imagined there was a dash of English aristocratic blood in his veins.

But the old restlessness attacked him again after a few months; and taking ship at Harwich for the Hague, he bade adieu to England. Holland pleased him almost as much as the country he had just left: he saw there, he says, the same evidences of prosperity he had recently

seen,—riches, cleanliness, industry, and activity. He made the acquaintance of the Portuguese ambassador, Don Joseph d'Acunha, in whose society he passed many pleasant and profitable hours. D'Acunha was a man of literary tastes and of considerable reading. He gave Alfieri a copy of Macchiavelli, and was the first to direct his attention towards that writer. His conversation awoke in the young man a feeling of shame at his own ignorance, and at the idle life he was leading. He began to experience a desire to acquire information, to distinguish himself in letters. It would have been well had he formed no more disturbing intimacy than this at the Hague; but woman's beauty lured him into dangerous companionship.

He became acquainted with a young and charming woman, full of the most fascinating timidity and grace. Her attractions, however, should have escaped his admiring glances. The lady was in the first year of her marriage; but Alfieri disregarded this; he thought only of her sweet face and her gentle manners. Constantly in her society, he soon began to feel unhappy the moment he was out of it. He wished to be ever near her. He determined to stop at the Hague all his life, for he felt that he could not live away from her.

Divided between friendship and love, his time passed happily as the summer day. He was inspired by the most elevated feelings; his mind was filled with ideas such as had never entered it before. All melancholy was banished; in its place were hope and activity. He was a new being. For the first time in his life he seemed to have exhausted the fountain of desire. He had nothing left in the world to wish for. He was overflowing with tranquil pleasure. He spoke of his friend D'Acunha to the lady; he spoke of the lady to his friend: there



was a constant stream of sympathy passing between those three hearts.

Alfieri's happiness was not of long duration. The husband of the lady was fond of change of scene. He had bought a barony in Switzerland, and was going there to pass the autumn. Before doing so, he paid a short visit with his wife to Spa. If he noticed the strong affection of Alfieri, he did not show it. It might be that he was not jealous, or that being so, he adopted the wisest course, — concealed his jealousy. That ugly demon is best kept under restraint. Give him but a little liberty, and what bounds will he not oftentimes overpass! Alfieri was allowed to follow on to Spa, and not a word was said.

Separation was soon to come. The husband was to set out for Switzerland; the wife was to visit her mother in the country. As Alfieri could not follow her there, he returned to the Hague, desolate and spirit-broken. For a short time his happiness was restored to him. As soon as the husband started for Switzerland, the wife left her mother's house and came back to the Hague. For ten days Alfieri was uninterruptedly in her society, and felt himself happy beyond expression. He knew that they must soon part, but he had not the courage to ask—nor had she to tell him—the day of her departure.

One morning his friend D'Acunha came to him with a letter. It was the death-warrant of his love. He was struck as though senseless by the words it contained. It was from the young wife. It announced, with tenderness and affection, that she had been forced to rejoin her husband; that he had commanded it, and that she must not disobey him. She was already gone! It was in vain that D'Acunha, sympathising with the visible anguish of his friend, endeavoured to console and calm it. It was in vain that he exhorted Alfieri to bear with

fortitude a wound that was without remedy, and to control his reason and his passions. Alfieri could make no such effort. His dream of happiness was rudely brought to a conclusion. He could not stand up against the shock; he wished for nothing but death to close his sufferings. He even took the first step towards that dread resting-place where he hoped for peace.

Under the plea of illness, and indeed it was not a false plea, he called in a surgeon and was bled. Feigning, then, to be more calm, and to wish for sleep, he drew the curtains around his bed. He wished for ever to shut out the light of day. When all was still, he gently unbound the surgical bandages, and laid himself down to bleed to death! But his valet was suspicious of the too great composure of a master who but a short time before had been so troubled. He entered the room as if in obedience to a summons, and discovered what had taken place. Without pretending to regard it as anything more than an accident, he re-fastened the bandages, and then sent for one of the friends of his master. Alfieri, already ashamed of what he had done, made no further attempt upon his life. His sorrow gradually yielded to the good counsel of D'Acunha and the buoyancy of youth. But the Hague had become a hateful spot to him; he hastened to leave it, going in the first place to Utrecht. Thence he passed to Brussels, and so, through Switzerland and Savoy, to Piedmont. During the whole of the journey he scarcely raised his eyes to look to the right or to the left, and communicated with his servant by signs only, so deeply did his disappointment affect him; so much did he feel in want of mental repose.

## CHAP. VII.

## FRESH WANDERINGS, AND THEIR RESULTS.

ALFIERI had bought, in Geneva, a number of books, and these formed almost his sole companions while he stayed in Piedmont. Among these books were the works of Rousseau, of Montesquieu, of Helvetius, of Voltaire, and others. Rousseau, strangely enough, did not please him. He took up the "Nouvelle Héloïse," but could not finish that remarkable work. Montesquieu delighted and surprised him. He read it through twice. Helvetius made upon him a profound, but disagreeable impression. With Voltaire's prose he was pleased, but of his poetry he soon grew weary. The author in whom he found most enjoyment was Plutarch. Plutarch was the consoler of his sorrow. He read and re-read the life of Timoleon, of Cæsar, of Brutus, of Pelopidas, and of others, with cries, with tears, with such transports that he became almost mad. He would have been believed so, he assures us, by any one in the next chamber. When he read of great acts, he was furious by thinking of the littleness amid which he lived. Italy of the past, Italy of the present, rose before him like a night-mare dream.

Plutarch filled him with thoughts which were ultimately to lead him from the idle, useless life he followed, to one of activity and profit. Day by day his position

became more galling to him. Day by day he felt the desire for distinction gnawing at his heart. But he knew not yet in what manner to appease it. While still undecided, he devoted himself for a whole winter to the study of astronomy, finding his mind much elevated by the knowledge he acquired, imperfect as it was. He had for a moment an idea of diplomacy, and his brother-in-law encouraged it. A marriage, too, was proposed, which would have, it was thought, the effect of fixing him in some occupation. But the project came to nothing, and with its failure all idea of diplomacy ceased. There seemed only one mode in which he could employ himself, and that was to travel again. Accordingly in the month of May, 1769, he set out upon his second grand journey.

Vienna was the first city towards which he directed his steps. The fever for travelling, being to a great extent subdued, had given place to a gentle melancholy. Alfieri's chief occupations were reading and reflection. He carried with him the *Essays of Montaigne*, from time to time read a page or two, and passed the next hour, perhaps, in following up the train of thought suggested by what he had read. It was *Montaigne*, more than any other author, who first taught him, he tells us, to *think*. At this time so completely had he forgotten his school learning, that when he met with a passage in Latin he was obliged to pass it over unread. Even Italian gave him more trouble than he cared to bestow, and he generally dismissed it in the same manner, or referred to the notes for a translation. All the fruits of his former education were decaying, but the seeds of a richer fruit were being sown.

At Vienna, making the acquaintance of Count di Canale, the Piedmontese Minister there, he was offered by that official an introduction to the celebrated poet

Metastasio. But Alfieri, overflowing with republican ardour inspired by his reading of Plutarch, declined the proposal. He had seen Metastasio bend so low before Maria Theresa at Schoenbrunn—with such sycophantic unction and servile pliancy—that he was disgusted. He would not make the acquaintance of a man capable of acting thus. If his body could so bend and twist, might not his mind be equally elastic?

From Vienna, after various excursions, Alfieri went into Hungary, and in September found himself at Berlin. He was presented to the great Frederick, but it was an honour which annoyed rather than gratified him. The military display he met with everywhere in Prussia was not to his taste. The whole country appeared to him like a huge barrack; he was glad to get out of it, into the fresh open air. With Copenhagen, which he next visited, he was more pleased. The industry and well-being he saw around him told of liberty, and liberty always warmed his heart. The Italian language, which he had so long neglected, he here began to study anew, incited by the advice of the Neapolitan Minister, with whom he became acquainted. When not thus employed, his chief occupation was to drive out in a sledge. The speed and novelty of this mode of travelling afforded him the most stirring pleasure. Amongst the works he read, was the “Dialogues” of Aretino, which disgusted him by their obscenity, but charmed him by their graceful style. Plutarch and Montaigne were, however, his chief resources. The latter was always by his side, and the former he re-read for the third and fourth time.

From Denmark he crossed into Sweden, and was so delighted with the country, that at first he thought of fixing himself there for life. For a time he was never tired of piercing its sombre forests—of darting over its

frozen lakes ; all the scenes he met with, so strange to one of Southern blood, stamped their grandeur upon his mind. Sweden, however, losing its attraction, and the thirst for novelty inflaming him, he set out for Finland and Russia. Arrived at St. Petersburg, after long and fatiguing journeys, he found that city as little to his taste as Paris. He had read Voltaire's "Life of Peter the Great"—he had been at college with Russian lads: on all sides he had been led to expect a city of marvels. Everything disappointed him. He could not tell whether it was night or day when he arrived. The place seemed like an Asiatic camp ; the people mere barbarians, aping European refinement and civilisation. He was so displeased with everything he saw, that during the six weeks he remained he would not make the acquaintance of any of the inhabitants, and refused to be presented to the Empress Catherine II. Her name was already stained with crime ; but had it not been so, the tyranny she exercised would have rendered her odious in Alfieri's eyes.

Hastening away from St. Petersburg, he visited in succession Riga and Revel, Köningsberg and Dantzic, and came again to Berlin. After a tour in Germany and upon the Rhine he arrived at the Hague, and set sail again for England.

His second stay in London did not pass over quite so pleasantly as the first. At his previous visit the charms of a lady of high rank had made a deep impression upon his ardent nature. But he was very young somewhat retiring in disposition, not at ease in the society of women. He had departed without declaring his passion. Upon his return, forgetting everything that had taken place at the Hague, the old feeling burst out anew, but with tenfold violence. It was so powerful, so irre-



sistible, so furious, that, twenty years after, when he thought of it, his whole frame trembled. Unfortunately, there was the same obstacle in the path of his love as there had been in Holland; the same circumstances to render it discreditable, its indulgence unlawful. The lady, a daughter of Lord Rivers, was already married. She was the wife of Lord Ligonier an Irish baron, nephew of the famous John Ligonier who fought in Marlborough's campaigns, and won thereby a seat in the English peerage.

This, however, was little regarded by Alfieri—little regarded by the lady herself. Availing himself of every opportunity to be by her side, he was with her nearly every day—at the opera, at fashionable parties, in the park, and, after a time, in her own house. Each day drew their bonds of intimacy closer. As the season for leaving London approached, and he saw no further hope of tasting his dangerous bliss, he became almost mad; he acted as though he were quite so. He believed his death would follow the separation about to take place, and he gave himself up to the wild recklessness inspired by the idea. Hitherto some little caution had been used in the intercourse which had taken place between Alfieri and the lady: Love had presided at their councils, but Prudence had been allowed to speak. Now it was almost utterly silenced. Meetings took place at the country residence as they had taken place in town, but attended with ten times more danger, with ten times more torture when the hour for separation came. In the interruptions of this intercourse—the necessary intervals between each visit—Reason may be said to have lost her last hold upon Alfieri; he was no longer a sane being; he was mad. Strong passion, rather than strong drink, had intoxicated him to delirium. No

moral restraint could hold him. The firmest chains of duty were snapped in his hand like twigs.

On one of these days of wild excitement, to spur onwards the lagging hours, he went out riding with a friend. The demon huntsman of the German ballad never rode so wildly as did Alfieri this day. Hedges and ditches, gates and stiles, were dashed over with a maddened energy that seemed only to seek danger for the purpose of despising it. When life was held on such a loose tenure, what need of fearing death? A check was, however, in store for Alfieri, which his recklessness well deserved. Leaping carelessly, with hanging bridle and heedless manner, at a high gate, his usual good fortune forsook him; his horse struck against the bars, and rider and steed rolled upon the ground. In an instant Alfieri was upon his feet, and, securing his horse, leaped upon its back, drove the spur deep into the animal's sides, directed himself towards the gate, and cleared it at a bound, heedless of the warning voice of his friend, which entreated him to pause.

His honour as an equestrian thus redeemed, he soon had cause to remember the accident that had jeopardized it. Wild excitement had hitherto blinded him to all sense of injury; but now a sudden and sharp pain made it apparent; his shoulder was put out of joint, and a bone broken. When, after a painful journey, he reached home, the shoulder was bandaged by a surgeon. The patient was ordered to remain in bed: he did so that night; but the next there was an appointment of love to be kept. In spite of every remonstrance on the part of his servant, he insisted on keeping it. It would have been well in every respect for him had he stopped away.

He returned to London feverish with the delights of

his stolen pleasures, in a frenzy of mental conflict, and an agony of bodily pain from the injury his shoulder had received. He went to the opera. A prophetic feeling told him that a crisis was at hand. But he was prepared for all things: to give death or to receive it he was equally ready; happiness must follow, whichever catastrophe arrived.

He had been seated in the box of one of his friends, endeavouring to appear as though calmly listening to the music, but in reality torn by a hundred strong emotions, when a slight altercation outside, and the echo, as it were, of his name, roused his attention. Without a sound he rose, opened the door, gently closed it behind him, and left the box. Lord Ligonier stood before him.

Alfieri had foreseen this meeting from the first, and had desired it. He felt that he was injuring another, and he wished to wipe out the offence in blood,—he cared not from whose veins it flowed: he would gain all, or lose all, at a single blow. But few words passed between Alfieri and the man he had wronged; they understood each other's meaning without speech. With terrible calmness they left the theatre.

It was about half-past seven in the evening. In the long summer days of that period the opera commenced at six o'clock. From the Haymarket they passed into St. James's Park, walking along the Mall, and entered the wide open slope which then, as now, bore the name of the Green Park. It would be a strange spot on which to fight a duel in the present day, at eight o'clock on a summer's evening; but it was sufficiently solitary and deserted then for such a proceeding. Lincoln's-Inn Fields we know had been used for a similar purpose only a few years before. Choosing the most sequestered position, Alfieri and his companion

prepared to fight. Every gentleman in full dress wore a sword in those days ; weapons, therefore, were at hand.

During their strange walk to the park silence had been broken. Lord Ligonier had reproached Alfieri with his perfidious conduct, and, by a recital of the most minute details, showed that he knew his honour had been wounded to its very core. For some time Alfieri replied not, or replied in words that gave neither assent nor contradiction to the other. Entrapped at last by an ingeniously-worded speech, he inadvertently confessed his guilt, and by implication that of the lady. There was no need for further parley after this.

Just as they were upon the point of drawing their swords, the disabled state of Alfieri's left arm, which was in a sling, attracted the notice of his opponent. With a generous consideration worthy of the delicate sentiment of chivalrous days, Lord Ligonier asked if it might not hinder Alfieri from fighting. It would not, he was told with a grateful acknowledgment of his courtesy ; and, preceded by these passages of politeness, the combat commenced.

There could be little doubt in which way it would terminate. Alfieri, never very skilful in the use of arms—he had disliked them, as we know, in his youth—sprang upon the other against all the rules, against all the precautions of the art ; his only desire was to be killed. He attacked his opponent in the most reckless manner. His motions were so irregular, so rapid, that the sun, which had been behind him at the commencement of the duel, in seven or eight minutes stared him full in the eyes. His sword was hacked like a saw, and broken in two. In another moment he had received a thrust that penetrated through his flesh.

The duel was at an end ; Lord Ligonier was satisfied,

and went his way. Alfieri remained alone upon the ground.

He was injured, but very slightly; so slightly that at first he felt no pain. Upon examination he found the sleeve of his coat torn, and a light wound upon his right arm, between the wrist and the elbow. As he could not, from the disabled state of his shoulder, take his coat off, or give himself any assistance with his left arm, he fastened, by the aid of his teeth, a handkerchief round his new wound, and in this state went through the streets. He was at the opera again in an hour from the time he had quitted it.

For some time after this event he cherished the hope of making Lady Ligonier his wife as soon as the law had rendered her free to marry again. A suit for divorce had been commenced against her by her husband; and with the overwhelming testimony he was able to bring against her, there could be no doubt as to the result. She had flown to London to find consolation for her disgrace in the arms of her lover.

Let us pause here. I have given these details with some misgiving; but without them the narrative of Alfieri's life would be incomplete. Besides, I am the chronicler, not the critic, of that narrative: if we would arrive at truth, truth must be told. As our great modern satirist has said, "If it be not always pleasant, at any rate it is best." For those who would pursue the story further, there are plenty of authorities from whom to seek for information. The cause of "Lord Ligonier against Lady Ligonier" was one of the monster scandals of the day. The journals were full of it; it was the topic of conversation in every society; it was talked of in the streets. All London rang with it, as all London rings now with a great murder or a great

victory, though the sound in these latter times leaves louder and more numerous echoes upon the ear. It is not the fault of the modern newspaper if the assassin and the poisoner do not become, for three months, more celebrated than the heroes of antiquity, or the great men of later days; but with a public so thirsty for knowledge, how refuse to quench it?

For those who wish, then, to drain this sad history to its very dregs, plenty of sources are open. There is one book especially from which they may take many a hearty draught; seventy-eight octavo pages will fill them to repletion with the subject. The title of the work is a curiosity in itself; it is in apt correspondence with the size of the volume, voluminous in the same degree. Nothing less than a paragraph to itself will contain it, even after the suppression of several embellishments which would not adorn this page. Here it is:—

“The History of Divorces. Being select Trials at Doctors’ Commons From the Year 1760 to the Present Time, Including the Whole of the Evidence on each Cause, together with the LETTERS, &c. that have been intercepted between the Amorous Parties. The whole forming a complete History of the PRIVATE LIVES, INTRIGUES, and AMOURS of many Characters in the most Elevated Spheres; every Scene and Transaction, however ridiculous, whimsical, or extraordinary, being fairly represented, as becomes a faithful Historian, who is fully determined not to sacrifice *Truth* at the shrine of *Guilt* and *Folly*. Taken in Shorthand by a CIVILIAN. Vol. 3. London: Printed for S. Bladen, No. 13, Paternoster Row. 1779.”

Leaving this charming work, the title-page of which must evidently have been composed by a writer accus-



tomed to draw up dying speeches at Newgate for sale by street hawkers, let us say, in as few words as possible, the reason why Alfieri did not marry Lady Ligonier when he might have done so. Soon after the commencement of the trial, she confessed to him, with sobs and bitter tears, that he was not the only one to whom she had accorded her illicit favours. Her husband's groom had been Alfieri's unworthy predecessor.

The effect of such an announcement upon a high-spirited Southern nature was overwhelming. A frenzy more violent than he had ever before experienced seized upon him. Shame and rage struggled at his heart with a violence that threatened to burst it. He loaded the lady with reproaches, with bitter disdain. It is a wonder he did not kill her. But his affection was not altogether destroyed, despite the terrible blow which had so shattered it. He left her with the intention of never seeing her again; but in an hour afterwards he was by her side. He could not in an instant snap all the bonds that had bound him to her. There is still some affection even for the doubly fallen. Long to continue an intimacy which had had such a discreditable issue, was of course impossible. After passing some time with the wretched woman in the country, ashamed of his weakness and yet without sufficient strength to overcome it, he left her in a moment of returning anger, and went back to London.

The suit in the meantime proceeded. The divorce was obtained. Lord Ligonier's honour was appeased, both by the law and the sword. His erring wife retired into obscurity. Alfieri saw her only once again: it was years afterwards, in 1791, at Dover, just as he was about to set sail for France. She was upon the shore, and a look of recognition passed between them. But he felt himself unequal to an interview; and the circumstances

of the moment were not favourable to it. He crossed the Channel. Upon his arrival at Calais, however, he could not restrain an impulse he felt to communicate with her. He wrote a letter recalling their former intimacy, and expressing the warmest interest in her welfare. The letter, forwarded through a banker at Dover, produced a strange reply. The memory of the past weighed lightly upon the writer, or, with a woman's dissimulation, she strove to make it appear so. Her words are worth repeating.

"You cannot doubt," she says, "but that I am sensible of the marks of your remembrance, and of the interest you so kindly take in my fate, or that I received them gratefully; the more so, as I cannot regard you as the author of my misfortune, although the sensibility and uprightness of your heart make you fear so. You are, on the contrary, the cause of my deliverance from a world in which I was never formed to exist, and which I have never regretted a single instant. I know not if in that I am wrong, or if a blamable pride and firmness delude me; but I constantly foresaw what has happened to me, and I thank Providence for having placed me in a more fortunate situation than I have merited. I enjoy perfect health, increased by liberty and tranquillity. I seek only the society of simple and honest people, who pretend neither to too much genius nor to too much knowledge, who blunder sometimes, and in default of whom I rest satisfied with my books, my drawing, my music, &c. But that which most assures to me a fund of happiness and real satisfaction, is the friendship and immutable affection of a brother whom I have always loved above all the world, and who possesses the best of hearts.

"It is in compliance with your wishes that I have given you such long details of my situation, and permit

me, in my turn, to assure you of the real pleasure which the knowledge of the happiness you enjoy, and which I am persuaded you have always merited, causes me. I have often, during the last two years, heard you spoken of with pleasure in Paris and in London, where your writings—which I have not yet been able to see—are admired and esteemed.”

In the next paragraph we have a testimony, as to Alfieri's disposition, which is interesting. Alluding to the companion with whom he was travelling, and by whom he was loved, she says:—“It is said that she fears you also (I well recognise you there). Without desiring it, or perhaps without perceiving it, you have irresistibly that ascendancy over those who love you.”

“I desire for you, from the bottom of my heart,” she says in conclusion, “the continuance of your prosperity and of the real pleasure of this world; and if by chance we should meet again, I shall always have the greatest satisfaction to learn that it is so from your lips. Adieu.”

We have arrived at the end of the tale at last. Alfieri never saw, never heard of, the fallen woman again. There was, perhaps, a greater secret connected with her married life than even the tribunal of justice brought to light,—searching and careful as it doubtless was. It may be that we should find a strange story if we could untomb the dead and give them words. But we shall know no more now. We might not be benefited were it otherwise.

## CHAP. VIII.

## THE FIRST STEP IN LITERATURE.

HUMILIATED by the position in which he had placed himself, still suffering from shame and anger, Alfieri quitted England, hastening over to Holland to seek consolation from his friend D'Acunha at the Hague. His melancholy grew, however, instead of diminishing, under the consolations of his friend. Feeling himself unfit for all society, he hurried away to Paris. There another friend offered to introduce him to Rousseau. But he feared a meeting which he thought would be satisfactory on neither side. Rousseau had obtained a wide reputation for oddity of manners, sometimes carried even to rudeness. Alfieri was not a man to submit to this: he was as full of pride and obstinacy as the Citizen of Geneva. At the slightest word which offended him he would have retorted with interest. He did wisely, therefore, in refusing an introduction which, in all probability, would have been the prologue to an angry scene. Instead of becoming acquainted with Rousseau, he contracted intimacies in another direction: he bought a collection of the works of the principal prose and poetic writers of Italy, and made those writers his constant companions, although at first with but little profit. Dante, Tasso, Petrarch, Ariosto, Boccaccio, and Macchiavelli were the authors in whom he found the most pleasure.

The travelling fever was still on him. After a short stay in Paris, he set out for Spain. He visited in succession Barcelona, Saragossa, Madrid; the silent, deserted scenes through which he travelled acting powerfully upon his mind. He was filled with thoughts that moved him to tears one moment, excited him to laughter the next. Whether he smiled, or whether he wept, he knew not why in either case. He was possessed with those troubled fancies impossible to analyse, impossible to describe by words, which may guide the mind towards the highest aspirations, or lead it into apathetic indolence;—fancies which at times soften and subdue, at times inflame and irritate. Could he have written, he would have poured forth his heart in song. Or had there been one near upon whose bosom he could dream life away in the sweet transports of a chastened love, his spirit might have been hushed into repose. But there was no such solace for him, and his mind at length snapped the bonds which held and pressed it so tightly.

Alfieri's servant—faithful, trustworthy companion of all his wanderings—was one evening assisting him at his toilette, and while curling his hair, accidentally pulled it with the tongs. The pain was sudden and sharp. Alfieri bounded on the instant from his chair, seized a candlestick standing near, and flung it at the man. The blow was violent; it struck a dangerous part, the temple. At once the man's face ran with blood. Maddened by pain, the outraged servant flew upon his master. Alfieri defended himself; but had not assistance arrived, his life might have paid the penalty of his savage act.

The shame, the remorse he immediately experienced were acute. "Had you killed me," said he to the poor fellow he had wounded, "you would have acted rightly. If you wish, kill me as I sleep to-night; for I deserve

it." But the valet took no such revenge: he had sufficient clearness of perception to see in what frame of mind the blow had been inflicted upon him; what is more, he had sufficient magnanimity to forgive it. He made no complaint, he attempted no injury against his master; he simply preserved the two handkerchiefs stained with blood, which had bound his temple, and contented himself with showing them from time to time to his master. It was the only vengeance he indulged in.

Sobered in spirit, rendered more calm by the event which had just occurred, Alfieri continued his journey in a happier mood than before. When he arrived at Lisbon, an acquaintance he formed there with the Abbot of Caluso contributed to keep him in this frame of mind. The Abbot had passed through a somewhat romantic career, and deserves rather a longer introduction than Alfieri gives him. Born at Turin, he had been sent to Malta when only twelve years of age, as page to the Grand Master. Inspired by some narratives of military achievements which fell into his hands, he was seized with a desire to distinguish himself in arms. He entered on board a galley, of which, in a short time, he rose to be commander. Afterwards he became lieutenant in the service of the King of Sardinia. Quitting military life, he joined a religious order of Turin, and devoted himself to study and travel. He afterwards became secretary to the Academy of Sciences at Turin. When Alfieri met him, he was staying at the house of his elder brother, Sardinian Minister at Lisbon.

A warm friendship soon sprang up between Alfieri and the Abbot: it was of long continuance. Many are the instances of the affection Alfieri bore his friend. When, some time after, he was in want of money, Alfieri



pressed upon him the acceptance of a hundred or two hundred sequins, begging as a favour he would receive them. Writing to the Abbot in 1798, he calls him "my dearest master," and says he shall ever recollect the evenings they spent together in Lisbon, and a year passed in each other's society at Florence. When Alfieri was at the point of death, he charged Caluso with the dearest offices of friendship, and appointed him his literary executor.

Those Lisbon evenings marked a brief but bright period of Alfieri's career. The Abbot was a man of taste, of education, of most captivating manners, a "true, living Montaigne," says Alfieri. He was the only man of letters in whose society the wayward young man had up to this time found any enjoyment. They conversed upon literature; and the ignorance of the one was disarmed of its foolish pride by the gentle, unassuming wisdom of the other. Alfieri was compelled, as it were, to listen and to learn. He was even encouraged to write a few verses; and the reception they met with from his new friend, flattered him for the moment into the desire to write others. But the desire passed from him almost as quickly as it came. He felt himself unequal yet to the task.

After leaving Lisbon and visiting Seville and Cadiz, his only anxiety seemed to be to travel home as rapidly as possible. He passed post haste from town to town; took ship for Genoa immediately he reached the French coast; hastened on to Asti, where he saw his mother; and finally arrived at Turin on the 5th of May, 1772.

Cured, to a great extent, of his wandering tendencies, he was not yet cured of the restlessness which wearied and disgusted him. His brother-in-law pressed him to enter upon diplomacy; but he repulsed the proposal in

terms too decided for it to be repeated. He would not represent the Great Mogul, he said, still less the King of Sardinia, the smallest of European monarchs. He had, in fact, no desire for steady employment just then. His restlessness had been a little wearied in the various journeys he had made, but it was not yet quite fagged out. He took a house, furnished it with great taste, and for a time fixed himself there. The street in which he lived at that period now bears his name. It was first so called by the French. Upon the restoration of the Piedmontese Government, the name was changed to Strada di San Carlo. It was not until 1853 that its former title was restored.

In this house Alfieri collected around him a number of friends whom his wealth had drawn to him. They established a kind of society, having amusement for its sole aim, and meeting several times a week. Literary composition formed one of the pastimes of the members. Alfieri practised it like the others, and for the moment was stimulated by the applause it brought him. But there was no reality in such literature; it soon lost its hold upon his mind. He became more restless than ever; gave himself up entirely to exciting pleasures; never opened a book or devoted a minute to reflection or study. It would have been strange indeed if, under these circumstances, he had not again allowed entrance into his heart to that passion whose troubled joys he had already thrice tasted.

He fell in love, indeed, once more, and under circumstances as little creditable as ever. The lady was from nine to ten years his senior. She belonged to one of the first families of the city; a family which has had, in recent days, the honours of exile attached to its name. Notwithstanding her position, her previous conduct and

her private reputation rendered her quite unworthy of Alfieri's regard,—quite unworthy of his friendship. He seems, indeed, to have felt this so strongly, that he never once mentions her name in his memoirs. His affection was not one, therefore, from which he could hope to gain either honour or happiness. But it seized upon him with such violence, that, as before, every other feeling was subjugated. His friends, his horses, his amusements, all were given up. Every day, from eight o'clock in the morning until midnight, he was by her side,—discontented with himself for being there, but unable to tear himself away. His passion became a kind of frenzy. Even a severe illness, which carried him to within an inch of the grave, failed to cure him. The fetters in which he had fixed himself galled and tormented him, but he had not the resolution to shake them off. For two years he submitted to the yoke he had imposed upon himself, tortured by the self-reproaches his weakness forced from him.

At last he could endure it no longer. His life had become as a weight that pressed more heavily upon him day by day. It was now intolerable. He determined to fly from the fascination which had so long enslaved him; from the city which had witnessed his degradation. He set out for Rome. When only a comparatively short distance upon the road, his resolution failed. He returned to Turin. Again he set out, fully resolved to come back no more until a year had passed away. But the year only lasted eight days. On the ninth he was again in his accustomed servitude. He was so ashamed of his weakness, that he waited for night before he dared to enter the city. Evidently it was useless to fly. He must adopt some other means to gain his freedom. He must stay and fight the battle, or give up the

struggle for ever. His last act of weakness had deprived him, however, of all power. He was plunged into such self-abasement, that death or permanent madness seemed inevitable.

He rallied himself by a great effort, and determined to exert all the force of his nature. His first act was to part with his hair—sufficient at least to prevent him going into society without exciting ridicule. He then set himself to read; but page after page passed across his eyes, without reflecting a syllable of its meaning into his mind. Yet he persevered. A tragedy fell into his hands. It fixed his attention, and, when finished, gave him the desire to write. He composed a sonnet, sent it to a friend, was praised for the ability it displayed. The praise came to him before his ardour had cooled. It heated his imagination anew. He remembered that a year before, forced to be a silent watcher by the sick bed of his enslaver, he had carelessly, and for amusement, constructed the skeleton of a tragedy upon the subject of Cleopatra,—a subject suggested by tapestry which adorned the walls of his lady's room. To clothe this skeleton with flesh, and breathe life into its form, became on the instant his sole desire. He began the task with eagerness; continued it with unflagging industry. The first line written, he found himself already on the road towards recovery. But he determined to guard against all chances of relapse. In the hours when weariness compelled him to throw aside his work, or whenever he felt in danger of giving way, he caused himself to be tied to a chair so that he could not leave the house! One arm was left free; the other was tightly bound. He was only released from his imprisonment when he felt he had no need of further restraint. The room in which this took place, the window at which he used to sit con-

templating the house of his mistress, are still pointed out to strangers. When Lady Morgan visited Turin, they were shown to her by a singular guide—the Marquis of Prie, son of the lady who had exercised such power over Alfieri.

These strenuous efforts could not fail at last of success. Day by day Alfieri worked at his tragedy. Day by day he pestered his friends for advice; he consulted dictionaries and grammars without number; he corrected and recorrected, until his production was finished. A smaller piece followed—a farce called “The Poets,” ridiculing the other. Cured of his love and proud of the cure, he sent both pieces to the theatre, where they were played on the 16th of June, 1775.

“A day and year of eternal memory,” as Signor Paravia says, “not only for the Turinese, but for all Italians; because it was, so to speak, the dawn of the magnificent day which, thanks to Alfieri, was to rise upon Italian tragedy.”

## CHAP. IX.

## STUDIES.

ALFIERI had entered upon dramatic composition as a diversion, as a means of leading his mind from thoughts which enslaved and tormented him. That object gained, it would not have been surprising had he given no further attention to his literary performances, or merely regarded them as productions that had answered the purpose for which they were written, and from which no other result was to be obtained. But he no sooner saw them produced upon the stage than he felt an interest in them that was new to him. They were not unfavourably received by the audience. They were equal in merit to the ordinary productions of the day. But this did not satisfy Alfieri. He regarded them as the mere crude efforts of an uncultivated mind. He was ashamed that he had been rash enough to produce such immature works upon the stage. He begged the actors to withdraw them. After the second representation, this was done. He wished to write something more worthy of fame—something which should earn for him applause far beyond the range of the theatre itself. He determined to spare neither time nor labour to improve his knowledge and to qualify himself for the task he meant to undertake.

If we may accept the picture as accurate which he gives of himself at this period, he had need of much study



and of strong self-control before he could hope to arrive at distinction in the path he was about to follow. He was twenty-seven years of age. He had little knowledge of dramatic literature, beyond vague recollections of certain French tragedies he had seen represented years before. He was ignorant of every rule of dramatic art; he knew scarcely anything of the laws of poetic construction: so great was his ignorance in this latter particular, that a poem he wrote for a freemasons' banquet contained the most glaring errors in the rhythm. He detected them, it is true, ere the whole was finished. He did not alter them, however, and they passed without notice; although this, as he suggests, was probably because the masons knew as little about poetry as of building. But why talk of his ignorance of the rules of poetry? He did not know those of grammar, and could not, he assures us, write his own or any other language correctly. In addition to all this, he was so presumptuous and petulant that he would rarely listen to advice, however well meant.

Alfieri felt that to remove this ignorance and self-conceit it was absolutely necessary to go back to the lessons of his boyhood; to begin at the beginning, and pass step by step to higher studies. From the habit of speaking and writing in French during many years, that language had become more familiar to him than any other. His thoughts arrayed themselves in it intuitively, so that when he wished to express himself in Italian he had a double labour to perform. He had first to strip his ideas of their French clothing, and then to give them an Italian dress. But that dress always had an awkward and ill-fitting appearance. It was necessary, above all things, to effect a change in it. He applied himself with earnestness to the task, ceased immediately to read

French works, and steadily avoided them ever afterwards. When, years later, Madame Albrizzi—the Madame de Staël of Italy, as Byron calls her—visited him in his Florentine retreat, she found, we are told, only one French work in his extensive library, the *Essays of Montaigne*. He gave himself up entirely to Italian, toiled industriously through the grammar, and from the grammar passed to other works scarcely less uninviting to a mind such as his. As he found a town life interfere with these studies, he removed to the country, taking up his residence in a sequestered village at the foot of the Alps. There he continued them without interruption; wrote for the third time his “*Cleopatra* ;” and commenced putting into Italian verse two tragedies, “*Filippo*” and “*Polinice*,” which he had composed in French prose some few months before. It was fortunate for him that at this, the commencement of his literary career, he was not without critical friends really qualified to aid by their advice and correct by their counsels. Count Tana and a priest named Paciaudi were those by whose opinions he was chiefly guided. He had so high an appreciation of the influence they exerted over him, that he declared, in after years, if he had any claim to the title of poet, he ought to add to it, by the Grace of God, Count Tana, and Father Paciaudi.

After having translated his two tragedies he commenced the study of Italian poetry, going back to the most ancient authors, reading their works verse by verse, and noting the passages which struck him most. He applied himself to this study with so much attention—with such a determination to catch the full spirit of the author’s style—that he was oftentimes as much wearied after reading ten stanzas as he would have been had he written a similar quantity. He persevered nevertheless, and for

nearly a year devoted all his time to those studies ; concentrating his attention principally upon Tasso, Ariosto, Dante, and Petrarch. These authors once mastered, others were taken up. Some of them he read with such unwillingness, that nothing but the strong desire he possessed to become acquainted with every kind of writing, could fix his attention. Sometimes, indeed, even that failed him. One work, the "Galateo" of Casa, which he commenced, he was too enraged with to continue. After merely reading the first word, "Conciossiacosache," its immense length caused him such a fit of annoyance that he flung the book from him on the instant. Some years afterwards, however, he read and re-read the same book with others still less to his taste. But he was not yet sufficiently hardened to pass through such an ordeal.

In the midst of his Italian studies, his ignorance of Latin began to annoy him. He resolved to recommence the study of that language, which he had now almost entirely forgotten. He took a competent teacher, and by his first essay under that teacher's guidance measured the depths of his own ignorance. The fables of Phædrus, which he had translated when a boy of ten years of age, he was now unable to understand. He was not disheartened, however ; but at once, at his teacher's suggestion, took up Horace, and studied it unceasingly for three months. It was hard work at first : he committed many blunders ; he seemed to make little progress : but all difficulty was at length overcome ; he found himself reinstated in the knowledge of a language of infinite use to him.

He had still the habit of thinking in French, and he rightly considered that he could never hope to gain a perfect mastery over Italian while this remained.

He determined therefore to go to Tuscany, in order to accustom himself to speak in Italian, and thus learn to lead his thoughts into that language. He set out in April 1776 with the intention of remaining six months. Arrived at Pisa, he made the acquaintance of the most celebrated professors there, seeking with avidity to draw instruction from their conversation and knowledge. The repugnance which he had formerly entertained for the society of men of letters no longer clung to him. A feeling of shame at his own ignorance had hitherto kept him aloof from those who were better instructed. That feeling had passed away, since he had resolved to remove the cause of it. He was ~~encouraged~~, too, by reflecting that the most essential requisite for dramatic writing—that of feeling with force—could not be imparted by any instruction. What he had to learn from others was the art of making them feel as he felt.

Whilst at Pisa, his life was one of great intellectual activity. During the six months he remained there, he conceived the plan of his tragedy of "Antigone," and wrote it in Tuscan prose. He put "Polinice" into verse, and translated Horace's "Art of Poetry" into clear and simple Italian, in order to render himself perfectly familiar with the precepts it contained. In addition to this, he commenced reading the tragedies of Seneca, and was so delighted with some of the passages that he translated them into Italian blank verse. From Seneca he also conceived the idea of writing two other tragedies, "Agamennone" and "Oreste."

At the end of his stay in Pisa he betook himself to Florence, beginning from that time to find his ideas assuming shape in the rich and elegant language he so much desired to acquire. His industry increased. The verses of "Filippo," the tragedy he had last written, dis-

pleasing him, he threw them aside, and entirely re-wrote the work. He drew out the plan of another tragedy, "Don Garzia," and committed to memory many of the best passages of his favourite authors, Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, and Ariosto.

Six months had passed away in Tuscany, but not without yielding good fruit. Alfieri would have stopped longer to gather more, but his arrangements were made for returning to Turin, and in the month of October he left Florence for that city. He returned principally for the purpose of preparing for a more extended visit. He did wisely in making a change of scene just then, for he was a little tired with his exertions, and wanted some amusement. He tasted it, nevertheless, in strict moderation, not allowing pleasure to interfere with studies. All through the winter he kept to them with unflagging perseverance. After having read Horace and a number of other authors, he took up Sallust. He was so delighted that he translated it with the utmost exactitude. While thus engaged the Abbot of Caluso, whose acquaintance he had made in Portugal, paid him a visit, and encouraged him in his literary occupations.

Another friend, Count Tana, aided him with judicious praise, which was a strong stimulant to activity. Towards the end of the year Alfieri carried a stanza to the Count, expecting for it the same dubious reception that had been accorded to all his previous efforts. To his great joy, the critic had not a word to say against the production. On the contrary, he praised it highly. "It is the first of your poetry," he said, "which merits the name." These were golden words to Alfieri. He felt himself recompensed for all the labour he had gone through; for the many poetic failures he had made. The poem,

a description of the abduction of Ganimede, became valuable in his eyes. He did not serve it, as he had hitherto served such productions,—throw it aside as unworthy of being kept,—but carefully preserved it, and published it in the first edition of his poetry, with several others that he afterwards wrote.



## CHAP. X.

## THE COUNTESS OF ALBANY.

THE success of this sonnet, and the gratification he derived from his translation of Sallust, gave Alfieri a fresh impulse towards production. In the April of the following year, 1777, he versified his tragedy of "Antigone," the plan of which he had sketched in Tuscany. Friends praised it highly when finished; but it did not satisfy Alfieri. He felt that he had made great progress, but that he had still much to learn. Turin was not the place in which he could learn it, and accordingly he set out again for Tuscany. Although study had exercised a salutary influence upon his mind, it had not yet cured him of all his faults. Mixed with a desire for literary fame was a love of display, worthy of a titled simpleton of nineteen, but scarcely so of a man approaching his thirtieth year. He set out with a grand train of servants and horses, as a great lord might have set out; and with this procession at his heels, arrived in Genoa. Taking ship there, his voyage was soon checked by a contrary wind. Impatient at the delay, he left the vessel; was landed at the nearest point; continued his journey on horseback; crossed the Apennines, one servant alone attending him; and reached Sarzana. There his over-eagerness met its proper reward. The boat, containing

his effects and servants, had not arrived. He was compelled to wait for it. The time threatened to pass heavily; he knew not with what to engage himself. In this extremity, he borrowed Livy of a priest, brother of the innkeeper in whose house he was resting. The work inflamed him at once; he read it with the utmost avidity, and was so impressed by the narrative of Virginia and Icilius, that he conceived, on the instant, a tragedy upon the subject. He would have finished a first draft of it as quickly, if his mind had been free from expectation of the boat's arrival.

Pisa reached at last, he stayed there but a short time, fearing lest he might become entangled in marriage with a young girl whom he had previously met there, and with whom he had almost fallen in love. He had no desire to marry; he wished to be as free as possible to say and to write the truth. He thought that as father or husband he should have less chance of doing so, than as a free wanderer such as he then was. He hastened, therefore, away to Sienna.

He found there a small society of intellectual people from whom he derived much instruction and pleasure. With one of these, named Gori Gandellini, Alfieri formed a lasting intimacy. To the advice and friendly intercourse of this worthy man Alfieri always expressed himself much indebted. It was Gandellini, or Gori as he was affectionately called, who induced Alfieri to read Macchiavelli's account of the conspiracy of the Pazzi, for the purpose of writing a tragedy upon it. He took up the work, and was so fixed by it, that for a time he could attend to no other study. He became so excited by what he read, that he could not rest until he had set free the thoughts it had given birth to in his mind. His tragedy conceived, he disregarded it for

the moment; and sitting down, wrote in a breath the first two books of an essay upon Tyranny, exactly as they were printed several years afterwards.

The months passed rapidly at Sienna, for Alfieri was incessantly engaged in literary occupations,—now devoting himself to his tragedies, and now to classical studies. As the winter approached, and the town did not seem to him a desirable place of residence during that season, he determined to remove for a month to Florence, uncertain whether to stay there longer or to return to Turin. Circumstances occurred which gave precision to his plans.

During his previous visit to Florence, a young and lovely woman was staying there with her husband, the Count of Albany. Royal fugitive and exile, the Count had played a conspicuous part in some of the troubled scenes of English history; but it was under a name more familiar, perhaps, to English readers.

The young Pretender, Charles Edward, had failed in his attempt at revolution in 1745, as his father, the Chevalier St. George, had failed in 1715. The Courts of France and Spain were desirous, nevertheless, that the race of the Stuarts should not become extinct. They arranged a marriage for the young Pretender, and fixed upon Louisa, Princess of Stolbergh, to give birth to the future line of kings he was to originate. When only nineteen years of age, she was taken from the convent at Mons, where for some time she had been Canoness, and was made his wife, without her wishes or affections being consulted in the slightest degree. In most royal marriages it is the same. Wife is handed over to husband much in the same manner that a slave is handed over to a new owner. There is a signing of papers, a payment in bonds or money, and the slave,

without voice in the matter, is transferred. The extremes of civilisation evidently meet.

The plans of the two Courts were, however, defeated. No issue resulted from the marriage. The star of the young Pretender soon ceased, in consequence, to shine. His father, the Chevalier St. George, living at Rome under the special protection of the Pope, was treated in every respect as a sovereign. When he died, the son naturally expected similar honour. To his surprise and anger, however, the Holy Father refused to recognise him. Disgusted with this conduct, he withdrew to Florence, lived without display, and assumed a title by which he was ever afterwards known, that of Count of Albany.

The Count and Countess did not, like the Pope in the old song, lead a happy life. The young Pretender was young no longer. His wife was still in the first bloom of womanly beauty. There was, then, a very great disparity between their ages. There was a still greater disparity between their tastes, dispositions, and habits. The Countess was all sweetness and candour. The Count was quarrelsome, suspicious, tyrannical. The Countess was fond of literature and the fine arts. The Count cared more for the delights of the bottle than for all the pictures, books, and sculptures in the world. We need not take Alfieri's assertions on the subject. Indeed, nearly all our information on these points must necessarily be drawn from other sources. Alfieri gives us very few details. Attempts have been made to throw discredit upon what he has said. If any doubt existed of his accuracy, it would be removed, as has been well observed, by his contemporaries of Rome and Florence. There seems to be no doubt, however, that the Count was continually in a state of intoxication. It was an old habit that had grown upon him. The Stuart intellect within him, an

intellect never very remarkable for over-abundance of power, in despite of my Lord Bacon's panegyric of James I., had been weakened by disappointment and annoyance. When in 1759, as we know from a curious memoir, the Duke de Choiseul went to him by appointment at midnight with offers of service, he found the royal person completely drunk. Supper was just over. He had taken so much liquor at that meal, that he could not speak without those verbal incoherences which oftentimes render the language of intemperance so flowery, but so confused. He was a fitting son indeed to the man whom Beatrix Esmond spirited away at the moment when duty demanded him to remain at his post. The polished Duke retired in disgust, and no fresh offers were made to the Unfortunate Prince.

With such a husband the position of the Countess was, as may be imagined, of the most painful kind. Her domestic troubles gave an additional interest to the charms of her conversation and beauty. She was the star of Florence, around which all lesser luminaries clustered. The entire city was at her feet.

Upon his return to Florence, friends of Alfieri offered to introduce him to her. But he had a disposition to shun women who were the most admired and the most beautiful. He refused. He could not avoid seeing her, however, at the theatre and at the promenade, and the first sight he caught of her left a deep impression upon his mind. Her eyes were jet black, he tells us, and filled with a gentle fire; and, in rare contrast, her complexion of dazzling white, and her fine flaxen hair, gave to her beauty a brilliancy it was impossible to be proof against. And from another pen we get a description which paints her in the same bright colours. "She was of medium height," says a French writer, who had

often seen her at this time, "but well formed, and with an exceedingly white complexion. She had very charming eyes, perfectly beautiful; a noble and gentle air. In dress she was simple, elegant, and modest." If to this we add that she was twenty-five years of age; that she had a mind cultivated by the study of the best authors; that she had much taste for the fine arts, and was herself an artist (she made many portraits of Alfieri, and a head of Euripides, by her hand, hung in his bedroom); that she wrote verses full of poetry; that she had a splendid fortune; and that she was surrounded by circumstances which made her unhappy, — we may well believe that few men could look upon her without loving her.

Alfieri was not of the few. He did not long hold out against the offer of his friends. Directly he had accepted it, directly he had been introduced to the lovely woman, and had spoken to her, all his firmness gave way. He was subjugated by a new passion.

There is a story of this first interview, told by M. de Stendhal, who had it from the lips of Count Neri-Corsini, which finds no place in Alfieri's memoirs, but which has been repeated so often that it cannot, perhaps, be altogether regarded as a ridiculous invention, although it is far from having the appearance of exact verity. According to Count Neri-Corsini, Alfieri was presented to the Countess in the Picture Gallery of Florence. He noticed that she observed with great attention and evident pleasure a portrait of Charles XII. In a conversation that arose upon the subject, she expressed in words the admiration her features had testified. The costume of the portrait had attracted her. She thought it exceedingly elegant. Alfieri listened attentively to her words. They made something more than an ordinary



impression upon his mind. Within two days he appeared in the streets of Florence dressed and adorned exactly like the Swedish monarch, to the bewilderment and surprise of the quiet inhabitants. However this may be,—and each reader will form his own estimate of the truth of the story,—it is certain that Alfieri fell violently in love with the Countess immediately after his first introduction to her. We have his own word for that circumstance.

He made a violent effort to escape from the golden chains which were beginning to fasten themselves around him. He flew in haste to Rome; but her image followed by his side, and gave him no peace there. He returned as quickly as he had left, merely stopping at Sienna to lay bare the state of his heart to Gandellini. That friend did not disapprove of the affection he had formed, nor did he advise him to struggle against it. Thus fortified and confirmed in his passion, Alfieri returned to Florence, determined never more to quit it while the Countess remained there. His heart was not less moved than it had been on former occasions; but it was moved by a purer, by a more gentle impulse. Hitherto love had agitated his spirit with all the force of madness; now plunging him into the lowest depths of despair, now bearing him high aloft upon the wings of imagination to the Alpine peaks of happiness. Years of thought had rolled over his head since a few months. Study, while it had enriched his mind, had tranquillised his heart. His passions had lost none of their innate strength, but they were under better control. They had been soothed into docility by the melodious voices awakened within him.

His affection, instead of distracting him from his studies, aided and encouraged them; it gave him, too, a fresh incentive towards literary composition. He never,

he tells us, enjoyed complete possession of his intellectual and creative faculties except when his heart was full and satisfied ; when his spirit was supported, so to speak, upon some being that he loved and esteemed. Whenever he found himself without such support, he felt alone in the world, useless to others, dear to no one. Melancholy seized him ; all bright illusions fled ; the world seemed hateful ; for days, even weeks, he had neither the power nor the inclination to open a book, or write a line.

Under the influence of his new affection, all the best, all the highest powers of his mind were quickened into activity. His imagination grew more fertile, more luxuriant. He worked hard : he completed works already in progress ; he laid out the plans of others. Nearly all his finest productions date their existence from this tranquil time. Well indeed may poets sing of the mighty power of Love !

## CHAP. XI.

## SACRIFICES TO LOVE.

THERE was one circumstance which, to some extent, cast a shadow over Alfieri's happiness. Seeing and conversing with the Countess every day, his admiration and his love increased at each visit. The idea of separation appeared more painful as he grew more intimately acquainted with her disposition; yet such a separation might at any moment be forced upon him by the position he occupied in his native country. He possessed estates which placed him among the class of nobles, holders of fiefs, who could not quit the dominions of their sovereign without that sovereign's permission. This permission Alfieri had generally obtained, as we have seen, without much difficulty; on the last occasion there had, however, been some little demur.

"You are going to Tuscany," said the minister through whom Alfieri applied. "Why, you were there last season!"

"It is precisely for that reason I wish to go again," was Alfieri's reply. The minister said no more: he at once gave the desired permission.

But his words had not been forgotten by the man to whom they were addressed; Alfieri felt that, under the slightest pretext, he might be forced to return to Piedmont, without hope of again being allowed to leave it. There was only one mode to prevent such an interfer-

ence with his liberty: it was, to dispossess himself of the estates he held. Had he been disposed to hesitate before taking this step, there were other restraints to which he was subjected, which would have decided him. By the Piedmontese law, it was forbidden to all natives of the country to print books or other writings out of the states of their sovereign without special permission, under a penalty of seventy crowns fine, and of other pains more grave and even corporeal, if the circumstances of the case demanded a public example. But there needed not this latter stimulant to force him to a determined step. His love was all-sufficient. He made over, accordingly, his estates to his sister, receiving from her in return a sum not amounting to more than half their value, but sufficient to yield him a life annuity of fifty thousand francs. This transaction was not completed without difficulty.

It was necessary, in the first place, to gain the king's consent to the arrangements, and then to go through long legal formalities, which, to a man of Alfieri's ardent, impetuous temperament, were wearying and offensive to the last degree. Indeed, before the conclusion of the transfer his patience and his temper fairly gave way.

He had charged his servant—the same who had accompanied him in all his journeys, and whom he afterwards rewarded with a pension of a thousand francs a year—he had charged this servant to sell his house at Turin, with all its furniture, plate, &c.; and to remit the amount obtained by the sale to Florence, by means of a banker's draft. Days passed. The expected draft did not arrive. Alfieri began to fear for the honesty of his servant, but yet he waited patiently for the draft. In place of it came nothing but tiresome letters from his

sister's husband, who was arranging the other negotiation,—letters raising innumerable difficulties in the way of a satisfactory settlement. Alfieri grew indignant. Confounding the two sources of his annoyance, he wrote to his brother-in-law a violent letter of reproach and disdain. He told him that if he wished to accept the donation offered, he had only to receive it; that he himself would never return to Piedmont; that he cared nothing for its king; and that if that king wished for the money, he might keep it.

Alfieri wrote in anger, but he meant what he wrote. He was fully determined to strip himself of all income, rather than remain under the slightest subjection.

It was a gloomy prospect. In his excitement, he saw nothing but misery before him. He thought of the means by which he might gain a living, and fixed upon the occupation of a horse-breaker, as one most suited to his taste and ability: it seemed to him the freest, the best capable of union with that of a poet. It was at least, he thought, easier to write tragedies in a stable than at the Court.

Fortunately, however, the missing draft safely arrived; the consent of the king was obtained to the transfer of the property; in a short time the whole business was satisfactorily terminated.

As soon as he had thus placed his affairs upon a new footing, Alfieri made great alterations in his mode of life: he dismissed all his servants, except a valet and a cook; he gave away four horses, all which remained to him after selling several at Turin; he gave up wines, coffee, and similar drinks, and confined himself to the most simple fare,—rice, broth, plain roast joints. He remained faithful to these temperate habits throughout his life. In a letter to his sister, written in 1794, and published

recently, he says, "I have the gout, but it is a gout to laugh at. I kill it by sobriety. I have not drank wine for ten years, and I am very temperate in everything else." As a final sacrifice, he gave up his expensive clothes, presenting them all to his valet; and ever after dressed in the most unpretending manner. Books were the only luxuries he indulged in: upon these he spent large sums. In nearly every other respect he became, for a time, almost as parsimonious as he had been before at Rome.

Three years passed rapidly away at Florence, laborious but fruitful years to Alfieri. During this time he had written his tragedies "Virginia," "Agamennone," "Don Garzia," "Maria Stuarda," and "Oreste;" a poem upon the death of Duke Alexander, killed by Lorenzino de' Medici; he had re-written, for the third time, his "Filippo," and had three other tragedies, "Timoleone," "Ottavia," and "Rosmunda," in various stages of advancement. A visit from his friends Gandellini and the Abbot of Caluso, the latter remaining with him nearly a year, aided his progress in these works.

But it was the affection with which his heart was filled for the Countess, that principally stimulated his imagination and his industry. He had the privilege of seeing and conversing every day with the woman he loved. Although it was only for a short time, and nearly always in the presence of her husband, it gave him a tranquil happiness that supported him through all his labours. But could such a life endure? Was it possible for Love to reign so long without being opposed by some conspirator against its sway? 'Tis a passion which governs the world, we know; but what commotions continually disturb its dominion!

Many troubled days were yet in store for Alfieri.



## CHAP. XII.

## FLIGHT OF THE COUNTESS OF ALBANY.

TOWARDS the end of 1780, a violent scene took place between the Count and Countess of Albany. It does not seem to have been caused by any jealousy on account of Alfieri, but to have been merely the sequel to other scenes that had from time to time taken place. The Count, almost constantly intoxicated, treated his wife in a manner that robbed her of all happiness. He kept her under domestic tyranny that would have excited the gentlest spirit to revolt. In the house or out of the house, in the church or in the theatre, at the promenade or in the salon, he had her always in his sight; or if circumstances compelled him to leave her, lock and key assured him of her safety until his return. Her chamber, on such occasions, was a closed prison, of which he alone was the gaoler. The Countess was fond of reading; her studies had extended over a considerable range of modern literature; her disposition, naturally gentle, had been softened by the cultivation of her tastes. For a long time she had endured her husband's harsh treatment in silence. She must have been something more or something less than woman, had she not at length determined to set herself free from it. She spoke on the subject to Alfieri. Together they

laid the plan of her escape, and soon found means to put it in execution.

This is not the place either to praise or to blame Alfieri's conduct. A biographer need not be an advocate. He has but to place before his readers, in the clearest light, the facts he has acquired. It is no duty of his to reconcile incongruities; to justify impropriety, to change virtue into vice, or vice into virtue. Honestly, and to the best of his power, to tell his tale, is all that is demanded of him. Fortunately, at this period of his history, we can be independent of Alfieri's testimony. He is not altogether an impartial witness in this case. Let him stand down. Other witnesses will tell us all we want to know.

One of the Countess's friends, and, consequently, one of the friends of Alfieri, was Madame Orlandini. She was of Irish parents, related to the family of the famous Duke of Ormond. Her father had been a general in the service of the Austrians. He had given her in marriage to a gentleman of Florence. She was now his widow. One of the friends she had made since the death of her husband, was Mr. Gehegan, an Irish gentleman. He had been in the English service; but quitting it against the advice of his father, fell under that father's displeasure; and, with a heavy heart and a light purse, came to Florence.

Directly Madame Orlandini saw the unhappy young man, she felt a strong interest in his behalf. What more readily moves a true woman's heart, than the sight of suffering and distress? She looked upon him with a favourable eye. It at once gave him boldness. Notwithstanding the presence of a powerful rival, the French ambassador, near the lady, Gehegan soon gained her entire affection. For many years they lived in

Florence, models of an affection and fidelity which find more favour in the sunny South than in our own land.

Such were the two conspirators who were chosen by Alfieri to aid him in his plot. The first step was to procure permission from the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Leopold I., for the Countess to retire into a convent. This favour obtained, the next step was to carry it into execution. It was not an easy task, guarded and watched as the Countess was by her jealous Cerberus. Woman's invention soon found, however, means to remove the difficulty.

One morning, Madame Orlandini came and breakfasted with the Count and Countess. The meal finished, she proposed a visit to the Convent of the Bianchetti, to see some works in which the inmates were said to excel. The Countess was of course quite willing to go, if the Count felt so disposed. He had no objection, so all three set out. Arrived at the convent, the two ladies descended from the carriage, and escorted by Mr. Gehegan,—who was there as though by the merest accident,—hurried up stairs. Before the Count could overtake them, a door had been quickly opened, as quickly closed, and the two ladies were safe within. When the Count arrived, all breathless, at the landing-place, only Mr. Gehegan was visible. That gentleman feigned excessive indignation at the position in which he found himself.

“These nuns are very ill-behaved,” said he; “they have closed the door in my face, and would not admit me with the ladies.”

“Oh, I'll make them open,” replied the Count; and he knocked vigorously and for a long time at the door, but without receiving any attention. At last the abbess came to a grated window, and announced to him that

his wife had chosen the convent as an asylum, and that she was remaining there under the protection of the Grand Duchess.

The Count was thunderstruck. He had evidently had no suspicion of the trick by which his wife had at last escaped him. His rage found unequivocal expression. It was all in vain. There was no redress to be had. The stone walls were not more indifferent to his words than were the inmates of the religious establishment. He withdrew to his own house, his anger for the time concentrating itself against Mr. Gehegan, whom, without displaying much power of penetration, he rightly considered to have been an accomplice in the affair.

But Mr. Gehegan showed, that, whether right or wrong, he was prepared to answer to the Count for the part he had taken. Hearing it said that the enraged husband had threatened to be revenged upon him, and to thrash him within an inch of his life, he determined to bring matters to a crisis. He wrote a letter to the Count, in which he said he was not a man to suffer such menaces in silence; and bearing the letter to its destination with his own hands, he waited for a reply. The Count was alarmed by the boldness of the young Irishman; he stifled his indignation, and at once showed the olive branch. He sent word, by one of his own gentlemen, that the reports Mr. Gehegan had alluded to were inventions of the malicious, and that he had for Mr. Gehegan a most particular esteem.

The Countess, meanwhile, remained in the Convent of the Bianchetti, awaiting permission to retire to Rome. She had written to the Count's brother, Cardinal York, for permission to take this step. She pleaded her cause so well, that the Cardinal offered no objection. He

invited her to come, and engaged the Pope, Pius VI., to accord her his favour. The road being thus smoothed, the Countess prepared to set out. Alfieri feared that the Count might be tempted to stop her flight, and seize her on the journey. To provide against this, a number of horsemen were secured, who escorted the vehicle in which the Countess travelled. Alfieri and Mr. Gehegan, well armed and disguised, sat upon the box, and remained there until Florence was far behind.

Left now to himself, Alfieri first began to experience the full force of the love he had so long cherished. He was incapable of all occupation, of all effort; he could not read a book; the most exciting pages failed to move him. He cared no longer to distinguish himself; applause, glory, even life itself, appeared worthless without the woman he loved.

Florence grew hateful to him, but he could not leave it at once for the city towards which all his thoughts were directed. It would have been unbecoming, had he done so. He remained, therefore; but it was in the midst of tortures that left him no repose. The days moved slowly, slowly by, and when a month had passed he could curb his impatience no longer. He left Florence, ostensibly for Naples, but in reality for Rome.

If he had travelled with delight when he left his mother's house, to enter upon school life, with what delight did he travel now! The rapture of hopeful expectation excited him almost to pain. The uninhabited and sickly country through which he passed, when near the end of his journey, seemed a paradise in his eyes. At every step he advanced, his heart beat with a stronger force.

Arrived in Rome, the moment for which he had so

long panted came at last. He looked once again upon the being he held most dear in life. Their meeting was but for a short time,—a grating between them,—but it gave fresh life to Alfieri. He resolved to use every effort to extricate the Countess from her prison home, and to obtain the liberty to which she was entitled. Love lent him skill. He who had been so removed by temperament from other men, so little disposed to yield to their humours or to sacrifice his own, now found himself possessed of all a courtier's pliancy, of all a flatterer's persuasiveness. He addressed himself to the brother-in-law of the Countess, whose interest it was indispensable to gain, and succeeded in inducing him to intercede with the authorities for her liberation. This done, he hurried off to Naples to avoid the scandal his presence in Rome might cause. But, until he learnt the success of the negotiations he had set on foot, he knew no rest, no tranquillity. The delightful scenes in which he found himself, afforded him no gratification. He was completely prostrated. Books gave him no relief. His tragedies remained neglected under his eyes. He tried to finish a poem he had commenced some time before, but the pen fell useless from his hand. He could do nothing but pour forth his sorrow in passionate letters to his mistress, and in tears and sobs. The only gleams of light that shone in upon this gloomy existence, were the letters he from time to time received in reply to those he wrote. But many weeks passed over before they brought the announcement he was so ardently praying for. In about two months it came, and it was more satisfactory than he could have hoped for.

The Countess had obtained permission to leave the convent in which she had been staying, and had entered into a suite of apartments in the house of her brother-in-law.



He had given her, too, a pension. The Pope had been equally gracious. He had given her a pension of twenty-five thousand francs a year. The Court of France had not been less liberal. When the Count of Albany married, the French king had offered him a pension. Thinking the sum too little, the Count would receive nothing; quarrelled with Louis, and ever afterwards cherished a bitter hatred against him and the nation he governed. The Countess had written to the Queen of France for this pension. Her request was acceded to. A sum of sixty thousand francs a year was granted her. Evidently other persons besides Alfieri were of opinion that the Count of Albany had not made the best of husbands.

Alfieri would have flown on the instant to see her, but prudence restrained him. He knew that an over-hasty step on his part might jeopardise her happiness and his own for ever. He delayed, therefore, his visit for a month, intending to delay it a month longer. But the struggle between love and duty was too much for him ere the second month had barely half passed, and he hastened to Rome without further pause. His visit brought down upon him none of the thunders of authority. Indeed, he succeeded so well in conciliating the powers of the Church, that he was tacitly allowed to remain in the city; and he had uninterruptedly the happiness of seeing the woman he so much loved.

## CHAP. XIII.

## DEPARTURE FROM ROME.

At once a great change came over Alfieri's mind. He settled down tranquilly to his ordinary studies ; continued to work at his tragedies ; re-wrote " Filippo " for the fourth time ; and partly composed an ode upon America. He had twelve tragedies under his hands in various stages of completion, and when these were finished, he intended to write no more. But at the commencement of the year 1782, the " Merope " of Maffei engaged his attention, and incited him to add to his collection. He had been told to regard this work as a model of style, and had read it in the hope of being able to draw some advantage from the author's language. But at the very first glance he was so disappointed, so dissatisfied, that he threw the play away, and dramatised its subject himself. He was so little proof against more than ordinary excitement, that when, a short time afterwards, he commenced studying the Bible, he broke through his determination for the second time, and took the subject of Saul for his fourteenth tragedy. It is one of his finest works. When produced for the first time, at Turin in 1802, its success, as we learn from the Abbot of Caluso, was prodigious. The actor Morrocchesi, who played the principal character, was called again, again, and again to receive the applause of the audience. Alfieri was so vexed with himself,

however, at this departure from his original intention, that he at first resolved to leave the two extra tragedies untouched until the others were finished. But this proved as hard to keep to as his former resolution.

During the whole of this year his imaginative faculties were indeed in such nervous force, that it was difficult to keep them under restraint. In six months he versified seven tragedies; invented, developed, and versified two; and corrected fourteen! Yet his method of writing was most careful and laborious, and is worthy of special description.

Each tragedy that he wrote underwent three distinct operations before receiving the last finishing touches. In the first place, the subject being conceived in his mind, he distributed it into scenes, fixed the number of the characters, and briefly wrote in prose the summary of what they were to do and say, scene by scene: this he called conceiving. Having done thus far, he put the imperfect work aside for some time, and did not approach it until his mind was entirely free of the subject. If he did not then quite approve of what he had written, and feel a strong desire to continue it, he burnt the manuscript, or changed its plan: the former fate happened to a tragedy he had sketched upon the subject of Romeo and Juliet, and to one upon that of Charles I. If, on the contrary, he approved his first sketch, he submitted it to a second process, which he called development. He took what he had previously written, wrote out at length in prose the scenes he had merely indicated in the first instance—wrote them with all the force of which he was capable, without stopping to analyse a thought or correct an expression. He then proceeded to versify at his leisure the prose he had written, selecting with care the ideas he thought best, and rejecting those which he

deemed only worthy of such treatment. Even then he did not regard his work as finished, but incessantly polished it verse by verse, and made continual alterations as he considered them necessary.

He spared thus no labour, no exertion, to perfect his works. Process succeeded process, all tending to produce this result. He looked upon his writings as upon the statue that slowly issues from the sculptor's hands, not one effort, but many ; laborious, patient efforts being required to develop the conception sought to be embodied. The system he adopted in order to be original, was less open to commendation. Whenever he found that the subject upon which he intended to write had been already used by another author, he resolved to throw no glance upon that author's works. He did more. Shakspeare's plays in French guise had fallen into his hands, and had much pleased him. Fearful lest he might be tempted to imitate what he read there, he gave up reading them altogether. His idea was, that he who reads much before composition, unconsciously steals much, and loses all originality.

Other men have, perhaps, entertained a similar opinion, but few can have had the courage to act upon it. What Alfieri lost by so doing cannot be determined. Judge what he might have done by what he has done, and the loss must appear great. He had only slightly to extend the principle upon which he acted, and all literature would have become a sealed book to him.

Even his manuscripts bear evidence of the care and labour he bestowed upon them. There are several preserved in the Fabre Museum at Montpellier and the library at Florence, which have all the neatness and regularity of print. They are written in a firm, distinct hand ; are punctuated with scrupulous exactness ; and

have many of the marks and headings only met with ordinarily in works that have passed through the press. If every English author could be made to write half as legibly, all the printers in the kingdom would hold a jubilee of thanksgiving and gratitude.

Towards the end of this busy year, Alfieri felt in need of some repose; and, ceasing his labours, went for a short time into the country. Upon his return, he amused himself by reading his tragedies in whatever company he could find listeners. It was not, he tells us,—and we may well believe it,—to gain the praises of his auditors,—for he knew that politeness would produce applause, if admiration did not; but it was for the purpose of seeing with his own eyes the *effect* produced by his works; of ascertaining by the countenances of his audience, rather than by their words, the opinions they entertained.

He evidently had a great desire that his pieces should be played. In more than one *Parere* of his tragedies, he expresses anxiety on this point. He cannot, he says of “Filippo,” tell whether the catastrophe be good or bad, until the piece be played. And in the *Parere* of “Polinice,” he says, he is so undecided as to the effect the character of Creon would produce upon the stage, that he does not know if he should not “hiss” were he to see it. “I cannot,” he goes on to say, “from mere reading, nor even from the most mature reflection, judge completely what would be the effect of the acting. Half a verse, even a single word, according to the place it occupies, may produce one of two effects completely opposite in their result and nature; the terrible and the ludicrous. Upon the stage, these two effects are always in close company; for the majority of the spectators do not at all forget that they are in a theatre,

that they are there because they have paid for admission, and that neither they nor the actors run any important risk."

We can scarcely wonder, then, that he should desire to see one of his pieces acted, as a still more severe trial than any to which he had yet submitted his productions. He wished, as he tells us, to ascertain the effect of the naked simplicity of construction he had adopted, and to see whether a tragedy of four persons would be tolerated upon the stage. The means for adopting this test were at hand.

Some of his friends, principally among the nobility, had given as amateurs, a short time before, a representation of one of Corneille's pieces. Alfieri proposed to these friends his own tragedy of "Antigone" for performance. They willingly accepted it, and the piece was produced towards the commencement of 1783, Alfieri himself sustaining one of the principal characters.

The experiment was quite successful. The audience paid a fixed attention to the piece, which convinced him of its effect, far more than he would have been convinced by the warmest applause. He was afraid the defect of the tragedy would be coldness; when he found this was not the case, he experienced two opposite feelings. He was delighted with himself as an author; displeased with himself as a critic.

Encouraged and fortified by the reception accorded to his play, he next determined upon a still bolder step, that of publishing a portion of his works. Four tragedies only would he, however, trust to this ordeal. He sent them to the printers; entrusted the task of correction to his friend Gandellini, upon discovering what an unpleasant task it was; and waited with nervous impatience for the first appearance of his work.



During the two months which elapsed before it issued from the press, this nervousness never left him. His spirits were in a state of constant agitation. But for very shame, he would have withdrawn his manuscripts, and renounced all idea of publication. When the book was at length produced, his excitement was so great, that, with all the eagerness of a young author who sees his thoughts in print for the first time, he ran from house to house, distributing copies to various friends. He even carried one to the Pope, and seems to have comported himself before that high authority in much the same manner as Metastasio had acted before Maria Theresa. But Alfieri could play the courtier, at times, quite as ably as they whom he ridiculed.

He had soon, however, something less agreeable to occupy his attention. The life he led at Rome was the most delightful he had yet experienced. He occupied a charming villa near the baths of Diocletian. During the morning he wrote and studied for many hours, then refreshed himself with a ride on horseback through the immense solitudes by which he was surrounded. The evening was passed in the sweet society of one for whom his affection grew stronger every day. By eleven o'clock he returned to his own residence.

But this was a life too tranquil to remain long undisturbed. Complaints were made to the separated wife, of Alfieri's frequent visits at her residence. Her brother-in-law the Cardinal, who was the chief instigator of these complaints, did not stop there; he spoke on the subject to the ecclesiastical authorities. He even addressed himself to the Pope. It was in consequence of the threatening rumours which began to arise out of these complaints, that Alfieri had bent so low in his interview with Pius VI. But finding, after a while, the

storm commencing to blow too strongly for him, he voluntarily quitted the city to avoid all further scandal.

Monti says that he was banished the city, and on account of an atrocious and fiery sonnet which he then wrote against the Pope, the Cardinals, the Nobles, and the Roman people. But this is incorrect. The Sonnet to Rome, to which Monti alludes, was written years before, in 1777, at a wretched little inn of Baccano, while Alfieri was flying from the Countess. Inability to sleep was the immediate cause of its composition. Certainly, its existence may first have become known at this time, and if so, would not have been likely to increase the good feeling of the Papal authorities towards him. But we have his own word for it, that he voluntarily left the city.

It needed a strong effort to part from the woman who had now, in a great measure, become essential to his happiness;—a strong, determined effort, such as few men in his position would have had the courage to exert. It was a conflict of emotion, from which he did not issue without wounds that threatened, for a time, to defy all healing power. The 4th of May, 1783, the day on which he quitted Rome, remained in his mind associated with the most bitter sufferings he had ever undergone. All hope deserted him. The world stretched out before his eyes like a vast desert, over which he was to toil on, on, without a change to gladden his heart; without rest, until he found it in the arms of death.

He lost, on the instant, all ambition, all energy. His tragedies had been criticised. He was praised; he was blamed. He cared not for either praise or blame. His studies ceased to interest him. A blight had fallen upon his intellectual powers. His life was a living death.

## CHAP. XIV.

## MORE WANDERINGS.

ONE solace was left to Alfieri, that of writing to the woman from whom he had been obliged to tear himself. He could use his pen for this purpose, if for no other. All the emotions of which the human heart is susceptible, he felt then. The only outlets for them were the letters he wrote. Anger, love, grief, every passion with which his breast overflowed, rushed into the page, foaming and eddying in a whirlpool of surging thoughts. How Alfieri's torn and bleeding heart would be exposed to our gaze, if these letters could be laid before us !

There was no relief for him but his old remedy of travelling, and that he adopted at once. He went at first to Sienna, where the conversation of his friend Gori calmed to some extent the fever of his mind. The horse exercise he took, too, by improving his bodily health, aided in this recovery. When at Venice, to which he shortly afterwards went, he was even sufficiently master of himself to take up his pen again for the purpose of literary composition. But it was a great event that stimulated him. The treaty of peace, by which the independence of America was established, had just been signed. Some time before, he had commenced, as we have said, a poem upon the subject of that country. He now continued and finished it.

This done, he set out again on his wanderings, leisurely passing through Lombardy and Tuscany. He travelled, it must be admitted, in a much better mood than formerly. Spots hallowed by literary associations, he now as diligently sought out as he had before neglected them. Men of letters in the various towns he visited he obtained introductions to, and listened with attention to their opinions. His four favourite poets were his constant companions when other society failed.

But he could only half rouse himself from the torpor of spirit into which he had fallen. The pedantic and oftentimes ridiculous remarks upon his works, which he elicited in conversation from the learned critics of Tuscany, sufficiently interested him to give his mind a disposition towards satirical writing, and he composed a number of epigrams influenced by this spirit. He was sufficiently excited, too, by the rather unfavourable manner in which his tragedies were received, to resolve upon publishing six others. At the commencement of October, after having been carefully corrected by his own hand, they appeared. Feeling then powerless for all further exertion, he determined upon a fresh journey to France and England.

His passage through the former country gave him greater pleasure than before. The wild solitudes of the Vaucluse so affected him, that he wrote four sonnets, entirely inspired by their beauty. Paris, however, disgusted him as much as ever. It was still "an immense sewer," exciting his mind to nothing but angry or sorrowful thoughts. Although he had letters of introduction to numerous literary men, he scarcely made use of them; stopped only a month, which appeared an age; and then hastened to London, solely for the purpose of amusing himself by buying horses.

His passion for these animals, extinguished when a more gentle sentiment took possession of his heart, had burst out anew. He bought one horse for racing, three for the saddle, and six for carriage purposes. In a short time he added four others to his stud, and had then fourteen in all;—"as many horses as he had written tragedies." For eight months they formed almost his sole diversion. During this time, all labours were given up; he composed nothing; scarcely ever opened a book. He thought as little of his works as if they had no existence, and lived a life of mere animal enjoyment and idleness.

When England began to tire him, he set out to return again to Italy. "Set out," as a note written by himself in the fly-leaf of a book given him by Lord Bristol tells us, "with fifteen horses and little sense." His horses had indeed lost none of their attractions in his eyes, and he had determined to take them with him. In the prostrate state of mind he was then in, perhaps it was not an unwise plan to adopt. They kept his attention occupied the whole journey. He became, in fact, so deeply interested in their welfare, that he was effectually diverted from every other thought. There was the shipment of the animals from England; the landing of them at Calais; their passage across France; the journey over the Alps. On all these occasions he was by their side. He would allow no one to take charge of them but himself. At the slightest inconvenience they experienced, he was all anxiety and solicitude. His efforts were ceaseless to secure their comfort and safety.

The passage over Mont Cenis with such a numerous cavalcade was difficult enough, and required all his vigilance to prevent accidents taking place. But it found him fully equal to the occasion. In ascending, he fastened

all the horses together in a line, and gave each a conductor, who led it by the bridle. Mounted grooms overlooked these conductors. A farrier followed, ready at a moment's notice to render assistance. Alfieri himself came last, with an attendant on each side of him to carry commands to the front whenever requisite. In descending on the other side, the order of march was reversed. Alfieri led the way; farrier, grooms, conductors, and horses followed. When the passage of the mountain was finished, so much care had been taken, there was not a single lame horse among the troop. Alfieri felt himself, for the moment, a second Hannibal.

Not for long, however, could these trivial occupations interest him. There was too great a void at his heart to be filled up with such small passions as those he had lately cherished. He had not rested many days in Turin before he lost all further interest in his horses, and sent them on for the rest of the journey under the guidance of his grooms. His long devotion to the stable had had the effect of improving his bodily health; but his mind had receded very nearly to the point it had reached at the conclusion of his previous journeys. It was so lethargic, that he believed himself incapable of ever conceiving another idea, of writing another line. Deprived of the support upon which his affections had rested, he was growing, day by day, more weary of his life's journey; less able to continue it. Nothing occurred in Turin, during his short stay there, to give him fresh strength. He was offered diplomatic employment under the Sardinian government, but he shrank with repugnance from the proposal. One of his plays was represented at the theatre. Instead of acting as a stimulant, the performance tended still more to deaden him. There was nothing for it but to continue his journey, and endeavour, amid



the changing scenes through which he rapidly flew, to escape the past and avoid the shadow of the future. Before starting, he spent three days in the society of his mother. He had not seen her for many years, and the meeting was dear to both. He never saw her again.

Journeying from place to place, he arrived at length at Piacenza, where he received news which changed at once the whole current of his emotions. The Countess of Albany was at last released from the restraint in which she had been kept at Rome. After much trouble she had obtained permission from the Pope to leave his dominions ; her health, materially affected by the later events of her life, requiring change of air. She had left Rome accordingly, and was now drinking the waters at Baden.

Alfieri was overpowered by this news. His first thought was to fly instantly and rejoin the companion from whom he had been so long separated. But other thoughts soon succeeded. He could not, he felt, follow such a course without danger to her reputation ; without exposing her to fresh arrows of calumny and scandal. It was the second hard struggle he had entered upon. For a time it seemed as though he would come out of it successfully. With an agitation which amounted almost to frenzy, amid bitter tears that gave him no relief, he resolved to fly from the direction towards which love attracted him. He returned to Sienna. There, in the society of Gandellini, he grew slightly calmer in spirit. He even laboured at intervals upon a little poem, he had commenced long before, and made some progress. But week after week he continued to receive letters which led his thoughts far away. Week after week they inflamed him more and more with the desire to see the Countess once again. At last, after

enduring torments that took from him, all mental control, he could suffer the agony of ungratified love no longer. On the 4th of August, 1784, he started away for Colmar in Alsace, where the Countess had fixed her residence.

Passing rapidly from town to town, only stopping as long as mere repose demanded, he reached, in twelve days, the banks of the Rhine. He was so overjoyed during the journey at the thought of his approaching happiness, that he could not contain within his brain the bounding ideas it gave birth to. Three and sometimes four sonnets each day escaped from him. A burlesque poem, too, the only composition of the kind he ever wrote, sprang into existence at the same time.

If the change effected in his spirit before reaching his journey's end was thus striking, it was not less so when he had experienced the happiness which that journey led to. By the side of the woman he loved, he strode back at once to the high position his mind had occupied when formerly brought into contact with hers. He was again a master ; he had ceased to be a slave.

## CHAP. XV.

## LITERARY LABOURS.

SCARCELY fifteen days had passed away at Colmar ere Alfieri began to think again of the literary compositions he had neglected for the last two years. Almost before he was aware of it, he had drawn up the plans of three new tragedies, "Agide," "Sofonisba," and "Mirra." The first two had presented themselves to his mind several times previously ; but he had always driven them away. Now he was no longer able to do so. "Mirra" he had hitherto thought unfit, like every story of incestuous love, for the purposes of tragedy. But he had just read in the "Metamorphoses" of Ovid the speech of Mirra to her nurse ; had been so affected, that while the tears were yet warm upon his cheek, he determined to write a tragedy upon the subject. It seemed to him, he says, that it might be made original and effective, if it could be conducted in a manner to allow the audience to discover for themselves, by degrees, the horrible passion which had taken possession of the heart of Mirra. His main difficulty was to fill up five acts with the development of this passion without seeking for incidents beyond it. Even after he had printed the work, he was ignorant, he admits, to what extent he had succeeded in removing this obstacle. He did not always remain in doubt. The piece was played with great success in his lifetime by

Madame Pollandi. It was taken up years afterwards by La Marchionni at the suggestion of Madame de Staël, and produced a most powerful impression. Byron, we know, is said to have fainted at the representation of this piece. In the hands of the gifted Ristori it has lost nothing of its effect. *Mirra* is, perhaps, her finest personation.

If Alfieri was doubtful as to the effect of his piece, he had none of those misgivings as to its purity which are entertained by some English critics. He thought it a play which would leave no stain upon the most delicate mind. "In my opinion," says he, "the strictest mother in the strictest country in Europe might take her daughters to see this play without any dangerous emotions being aroused in their breasts. And this is not always the case when chaste virgins are taken to see many other tragedies founded upon the most lawful love."

Two months passed away in these occupations; months, that unfolded bright days indeed to Alfieri. One shadow alone dimmed his happiness. It was cast by the coming time of separation, which now drew near. That shadow darkened, too, as it approached. Just as he was about to part from the source of his new-born tranquillity, he received news of the death of his friend Gandellini. It would have been sad news at any time; it was doubly sad now that he was on the point of departure from one to whom he was so much attached. Gandellini was almost the only friend who could have consoled him for her loss. Now his voice was for ever hushed, and the echoes it left behind awakened only sorrow at Alfieri's heart.

Dejected and spirit-broken, he tore himself away from the Countess, who went to Bologna, and returned to Tuscany. Sienna, which had become for some time past his favourite dwelling-place, now seemed desolate and

melancholy. He went therefore to Pisa, and passed the winter in that city. It was a long time before energy returned to him, and meanwhile his horses became again his sole occupation.

It was at this period that his fidelity to the Countess seems to have been put to rather a severe test. He makes no allusion to the circumstance in his "Memoirs." Probably he thought it not important enough. It is sufficiently interesting, however, to deserve a word of notice. A noble Venetian lady, living in Pisa, appears to have conceived a warm affection for him, and to have testified it in the most decided manner. Four letters from Alfieri to this lady have been published in a Milanese magazine. They are written in terms which give us good right to infer, that a most determined attempt had been made to gain his heart. We learn from this correspondence that Alfieri so far yielded to temptation as to make appointments with the lady, but that he remained proof against her attacks. "I have not the courage or the cruelty," says he, evidently in reply to a passionate appeal, "to write, in order to distress you; nor am I sufficiently base to deceive you. I have no inclination to console and flatter you; you yourself would esteem me less if I could do so." Further on, he qualifies these words by a more pleasing tone. "You have made me feel," he says, "that there does exist another lady besides my own;" and elsewhere he adds, "If I had known you first, no doubt would have existed in my mind. But I am not easily impressed. Things must go to the core, or they do not touch me." We have in this correspondence at once an evidence of the force of his affection for the Countess, and of the force of the attempt made to shake it. Had the former been less strong, it certainly would not have stood against such an assault.

Books came to his relief. The "Letters" of the younger Pliny was the first work which engaged his attention. The panegyric upon Trajan was the next. The latter roused Alfieri into activity. He thought it so unworthy of the subject and of the author, that his indignation was awakened. He conceived the idea of writing a panegyric himself. In five mornings he had completed the work and sent it to the press.

This hasty and impetuous effort had a most beneficial effect upon his mind. It lessened the weight of those sorrowful thoughts which had pressed upon it with so much force. It made him feel, too, that the only relief from such thoughts was to be found, not in regular and steady application to any easy mental occupation, but in labour demanding determined exertion and concentrated reflection. He acted upon this impression by at once devoting himself to a work, "*Del Principe e delle Lettere*," he had commenced some years before, at Florence. This done, he was left almost without occupation. There was the third volume of his tragedies, which had been printed during the preceding summer, to revise; but this was not absorbing enough to fill his mind. The description of his mode of life, which he sent to a friend, at that time, is an interesting illustration of this; interesting, too, as giving little details we do not find in his "*Memoirs*." He says, he pursued his accustomed habits: rose at four o'clock, to enjoy the view of sunrise; during the day, rode fifteen or twenty miles, read, corrected his tragedies, and slept; in the evening, drove out in a phaeton, or sometimes went to the theatre. In his walks his thoughts were principally of Gandellini and the Countess. With Petrarch, always carried with him, in his hand, he wept and read alternately; wept as he thought of the woman from whom he was separated; longed for death; wished



he had a reason for killing himself. In this state he felt, he says, as though his mind was dead, and his heart sepulchred; he no longer knew himself.

New life happily came to him. At the commencement of the following month he set out again for Colmar, to taste once more the happiness he had enjoyed there the previous year. It lasted, as before, but for two months; this time, however, it left no sting behind. Alfieri had fortified his mind to endure the separation which then took place, encouraged, as he was, by the hope of a coming time, when separation would no longer be necessary. The Countess had determined to quit Italy; he had resolved to do likewise, and settle in whatever country she chose for her abode. During the winter which followed their third separation, he devoted himself to literary pursuits with renewed energy. Never, he assures us, in a similar space of time, did he achieve so much.

He worked so hard, indeed—held his mind in such a constant state of tension—that in the spring of 1786 his health gave way. For three months he was forced to atone, by a life of inaction, for the too great exertion he had made. At the end of that time he visited the Countess again. The sight of her at once restored him to health, and to the enjoyment of his intellectual powers. He renewed his labours with ardour; and towards the end of the year, started with his companion for Paris.

We have a glimpse of him in his household there, from another pen than his own. The Marquis Pindemonte, says Benassu Montanari, was a constant visitor at the house. Every evening he took an omelette soufflée in the Countess's room, while Alfieri sat in the

chimney corner sipping his chocolate. They were accustomed to discourse on various matters, and frequently to dispute and quarrel with great warmth. Oftentimes when they met in the daytime, if Alfieri was displeased with any remark of the Marquis, who had written several tragedies himself, he would start up, seize his hat and cane, walk out without saying a word, and leave the other among his books and manuscripts. Occasionally he acted thus without any motive whatever. It was Pindemonte who caused Alfieri to suppress the first volume of a new edition of his works he had begun to print in Paris. The Marquis one evening was reading the "Filippo," in this version, and coming to a harsh verse, substituted another. Alfieri was so annoyed, that snatching the volume from his friend, he threw it in the fire. "To Vulcan then!" said he, as he cast the book upon the flames; and he determined that the whole volume should be re-printed.

He himself has left us the particulars of an almost similar scene. Upon one occasion he invited a French gentleman to pass judgment upon his "Sofonisba," and read to the third act, his critic listening with a coldness of manner most disheartening. At the end of that act, Alfieri could read no more. He felt that his piece was ineffective. Without the slightest previous warning, he started up, and threw it into the fire. The French gentleman tried in vain to save the unfortunate tragedy; Alfieri, seizing the tongs, held down the manuscript until every page was destroyed. It was a sequel to the Madrid scene with his servant, but dashed with a less serious interest. "Sofonisba," thus consumed, did not utterly perish. She rose again from

the blackened ashes upon the hearth, in a new shape which found more favour with Alfieri, but which he never regarded with entire satisfaction. In truth, he was not easy to please. Of all his critics, he himself was the most severe.

## CHAP. XVI.

## PARIS DURING THE REVOLUTION.

IT was in February 1788, while Alfieri and the Countess were in Paris, that news reached the latter of the death of her husband at Rome, into which city he had retired from Florence for the preceding two years. During several months she had been aware that his end was drawing near ; but when the event took place, she was as much affected as though it had been entirely unforeseen. There seems to be some mysterious bond of affection which binds a woman to the man with whom she has once been intimately associated, however coldly, however cruelly, she may have been treated by him. It was thus with the Countess of Albany. We might suppose she felt small regret for the loss of a husband who had done so little to gain her sympathy or to deserve her esteem ; from whom difference of disposition and habits separated her as widely as difference of age ; yet we have Alfieri's own testimony that her sorrow was genuine and deep. He was surprised at it, but it gave him even a higher regard for her. He had, indeed, good cause to feel happy in having gained that loving heart.

Left a widow, mistress of her own actions, and with nothing apparently to prevent her marriage to the man who so much loved her, and whom she so much loved,

we might well expect to find that the sanction of law was now given to an union which had hitherto had only the sanction of love. But we do not learn that this was ever the case. Alfieri and the Countess never quitted each other; they continued the same tender relations they had so long kept up, but not, it appears, on a different footing than before. Alfieri, at least, is silent on the point. Throughout his "Memoirs" he speaks of the Countess in terms of esteem and high affection; but he never once speaks of her as his wife. Whether they were or were not married, is a question which does not yet seem to be satisfactorily settled. In the Parisian society in which they lived, it was rumoured, we know, that marriage had taken place. A French biographical notice, distantly echoing that rumour perhaps, states the circumstance without reservation.

Another witness goes a little farther. M. Balleydier relates, quite in a nice dramatic manner, a conversation that took place between an ecclesiastic and the Countess, two or three days, as he says, "before her marriage with Alfieri." The ecclesiastic, according to M. Balleydier, wished to dissuade her from the match, on account of the difference in rank between herself and Alfieri. The Countess listened attentively to his arguments, and they appeared to have some effect upon her. She had made up her mind. The man she would marry was amongst the highest.

The ecclesiastic wished to know whom she had selected for her husband. Was he a prince?

No; he was greater than a prince, said the Countess.  
A king?

No; he was greater than a king.

He was an emperor, perhaps?

No; he was greater than an emperor.

The ecclesiastic asked no more. He knew that she meant Alfieri !

If M. Balleydier gave us good authority in support of the truth of this anecdote, and of the event which it verifies by implication, gladly indeed would it be welcomed. The story would be one of the prettiest little episodes in the history of the charming Countess. It would deserve to be printed in letters of gold upon a page of satin. But, unfortunately, it has at present so much the air of a thread drawn from the gossamer fabric of romance, that we cannot trust truth to hang upon it.

We know that on the tomb of the Countess she is described as widow of the Count of Albany, but not of Vittorio Alfieri. We know that in the will of the latter, it is to the Countess of Albany, not to the wife of Alfieri, that bequests are made. Had she any claim to the more domestic title, would not punctilious law have required it to be acknowledged in such a document ? We know, too, from a passage in his "Memoirs," and from a letter to his sister, recently published, Alfieri had determined not to marry. He gave up his fortune, in fact, to render marriage impossible.

There is thus testimony more or less conclusive on both sides. It may lean rather towards a negative conclusion than to the contrary ; but it cannot be said by any means to settle the point. More direct evidence must be produced. Hearsay and rumour can, no doubt, be alleged in abundance from French and English sources. That is scarcely enough. Might not some zealous partisan of either side search the marriage registers of Paris ? They would, perhaps, decide.

Paris did not displease Alfieri quite so much as before. What spot could have done so in such companionship ? Leaving the city during the summer and autumn months



for the more inviting attractions of his new home in Alsace, he returned towards the end of the year, after a severe illness, and fixed himself, he tells us, in a house, very cheerful and very tranquil, upon the new boulevard of the Faubourg St. Germain, at the end of the Rue Mont Parnasse ! What a position in the present day ! Un-numbered restaurants, cabarets, guingettes, and estaminets for workmen, are now the chief attractions of the district.

His stay in Paris extended over more than three years. He employed this time in printing an edition of his works with Didot, and another with Beaumarchais at Kehl ; in correcting them with the most laborious exactness ; in writing his admirable "Memoirs," so clear, so truthful, which he finished up to May, 1790 ; in occasional literary composition ; in various classical studies ; and in attending to the sale of his works. His industry in this last occupation, which we are made acquainted with through various letters only published in recent years, shows him under an entirely new and somewhat strange aspect. We find him acting like a thorough man of business ; sending subscription lists of his works to all his friends in Italy ; soliciting signatures ; bargaining with booksellers ; arranging various details with true commercial precision. We find him transmitting copies of his books to Venice, Bologna, and elsewhere ; stipulating as to price, expenses of carriage, &c. ; and complaining seriously to a defaulter from whom he can get neither cash nor an account of sales. If he had been seated in a counting-house all his life, he could not better have conducted such a correspondence. He writes as though he were his own publisher's clerk.

But a stirring time had commenced. Monarchy had begun to totter in France. The Republic was preparing

to rise upon its ruins. The whole population was moved. Alfieri, ardent lover of liberty as he was, felt no sympathy for the popular cause. He could not forgive the undoubted excesses it gave birth to, or look upon them as natural results of the misrule under which the French people had so long suffered. Calmer men than Alfieri, who were witnesses of the great struggle that took place, had their judgments similarly affected. They had pictured Liberty as a bland and lovely nymph, moving onwards with gentle step, a sweet smile upon her lips, an olive-branch in her hand, and with Peace, Prosperity, and Happiness following as her chosen handmaidens. They saw, instead, a form made almost hideous by suffering, hurrying along with reckless tread, her breasts bare, her eyes wild with excitement, her hair streaming in disorder over her shoulders, her whole frame shaken by strong passion, as she waved a lighted torch above her head and beckoned on her fierce and desperate followers. What wonder, then, if they were disappointed, and turned away in disgust?

Day by day the political horizon of France grew darker. The Bastille fell: Alfieri and his friend Pindemonte were among those who collected its stones as relics. A poem on the subject issued from Alfieri's pen. Things did not mend. The workmen of Didot, Alfieri tells us, taking the spirit of the time, passed their days in reading the journals and discussing political matters. Those men had greater works than even Alfieri's to attend to then. A storm was about to burst upon the land, and shake its institutions to their very centre. Alfieri determined to fly before the full force of the tempest made itself felt. In April, 1791, he crossed with the Countess over to England. They remained there a few months; but pressing necessity soon induced them to return. Alfieri's property was

invested in the French funds ; the Countess was dependent upon France for two-thirds of her income. With an almost bankrupt exchequer, it had become impossible for the French Government to pay in anything but paper money : that money, reduced in value from day to day, had grown almost useless out of France. It was necessary to return there in order to live. They came back accordingly in October, after a short tour in England and Holland, and a stay of a few weeks at Brussels to see the mother and sisters of the Countess, who were there.

But the months which followed were more stormy than those which had preceded them. A new year dawned, but it brought with it no hope of calmer times. Each day heralded in fresh events that hastened onward the development of the stern drama then in progress. At last came the attack upon the Tuileries, the destruction of the Swiss Guard, and the imprisonment of the king. Alfieri then determined to remain no longer in Paris. With great difficulty he obtained passports for himself and his companion, and on the 18th of August started for Italy.

Ere they were fairly out of the city, an obstacle occurred which threatened for a time to stop their further progress. Arrived at the *Barrière Blanche*, their papers were examined, and were found satisfactory. The gates were just on the point of being opened to them, when a wild, disorderly troop of revellers from a neighbouring cabaret came out, attracted by the well-laden carriage which contained the travellers and their effects. This mob commenced at once uttering loud cries against the inmates of the vehicle. They complained of being left in misery and wretchedness, while the rich were allowed to quit Paris, and carry away with them all their wealth. The guards of the barrier expostulated, but

all to no purpose ; the people insisted upon the carriage being driven back into the city. Inflamed with an anger that overstepped all the limits of prudence, Alfieri leaped from his seat and darted into the midst of the excited crowd.

“Look !” said he, thrusting his passports disdainfully in their faces—“look ! Listen ! Alfieri is my name ; I am an Italian, not a Frenchman ; tall, thin, pale, and with red hair. I am the person so described : look at me. I have a passport ; it is according to rule ; we received it from those who are authorised to give it. We are determined to pass, and we will pass *per Dio !*”

The mob had grown in size since the commencement of the dispute. It had uttered insulting expressions, desperate threats ; some of its members had proposed to lead Alfieri and his companion to the Hôtel de Ville ; others had suggested stoning them to death. At the sound of Alfieri’s words, at the sight of his determined attitude, their courage gave way. The guards took this opportunity to renew their pacific discourse. In a few minutes Alfieri was allowed to ascend to his seat again, and the carriage drove through the barrier, pursued by nothing more dangerous than the hissings, hootings, and curses of the baffled crowd.

They quitted Paris just in time, first of the foreigners who left the realm after the 10th of August. They had originally intended to start three days later : had they not changed this determination, in all probability they would never have left the city alive. On the very morning first fixed for their departure, an order was issued for the arrest of the ‘Countess. Wealthy and noble, she must have sunk beneath the troubled waters then so wildly raging ; and Alfieri would have perished in attempting to save her.

## CHAP. XVII.

## LIFE AT FLORENCE.

ONCE safely out of France, which they passed through with great difficulty, the travellers found no obstacle in their path, and on the 3rd of November arrived at Florence, which henceforth became their home. Removed now from the disordered scenes in the midst of which he had lived in Paris, and which for the last year had deprived him of the mental tranquillity necessary for literary composition, Alfieri soon found himself sufficiently calm to take up the pen again. An "Apology for Louis XVI." was the first result of this change; a satiric poem, called "Misogallo," relating to the events he had witnessed in France, and breathing the most intense dislike to the new government there, was the next. He evidently thought very highly of the effect this production would create. In a passage omitted from the first edition of his works, and not restored until 1853, he says he believed the "Misogallo" would some day do great injury to France, and great good to Italy. When the French entered Italy, fearful lest the work might be destroyed, he caused several copies to be made of it, and distributed them in quarters where he knew they would be safe.

Growing tired of composition, he engaged with a number of friends in amateur dramatic representations.

His own tragedies, "Saul" and "Brutus," were the first played : in both of these he took the principal character, devoting almost as much care to their embodiment as he had previously to their creation. We find, by letters published since his "Memoirs," that the fame of his acting spread from Florence to Pisa, and that he was asked to play in the latter city. When it became known that he would comply with the request, expectation was raised to a very high pitch ; so high, indeed, that fearful lest he might fall short of what was anticipated of him, he wrote in depreciation of his talent, to subdue to some extent the excitement. The interest he took in these performances is shown by the details with which his letters are filled. He says in his "Memoirs," that if he had had time, money, and health, he should have been able to form a good dramatic company. We might almost fancy by his letters that he had done so, and had been appointed its stage-manager.

Time sped with rapid step, passed thus pleasantly in one of the most charming of Italian cities, and surrounded by sympathising friends. It would doubtless still have continued to pass at equal speed, had these fascinating amusements extended farther into the growing years of Alfieri's life ; but in 1795, when he had attained the ripe age of forty-six, shame suddenly seized him for his ignorance of Greek. He resolved to study that language, and master it. Keeping the resolution a secret from his friends, he entered upon his project with all the ardour and determination which had previously characterised him. He was not, he says, a good linguist : he had tried twice to study English without success, he tells us ; but as he also tells us elsewhere that he used an English translation of the Bible when he was reading that work, and as we learn



from one of his private letters that he had attempted to translate Pope's "Windsor Forest" and the "Essay on Man," we cannot altogether credit his statement. He had, however, a horror of grammar, and knew not a single rule of Italian, the language he wrote in; nevertheless, he commenced Greek, firmly resolved to overcome all its difficulties. He succeeded so well that in less than two years he was able to read it with tolerable fluency, and had acquired a good knowledge of its form and construction. Before the expiration of another year, his industry carried him still farther. Homer, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides became almost as familiar to him as his own Italian poets.

Alfieri did not during this period neglect other occupations; Latin from time to time engaged him. At intervals, too, satirical writings came from his pen. He could not indeed devote himself to a studious life for any length of time, without feeling the desire to write possess him. Although, in obedience to his self-imposed law, he attempted to stifle this desire, it would burst out in spite of him. Some time after the commencement of his Greek studies, he read the "Alcestis" of Euripides, and was so much excited by it, that he felt irresistibly impelled to write a tragedy upon the same subject. He had previously published a translation of the piece from a Latin version which had fallen into his hands. That did not satisfy him. He wished to treat the theme from an original point of view. He checked, however, the desire; merely contenting himself with writing, on the margin of the copy he had read, "If I had not sworn to myself to compose no more tragedies, the reading of this 'Alcestis' of Euripides would have determined me immediately to write a new 'Alcestis.'" Two years afterwards the work of Euripides again came

before him. This time he could not resist its fascination. He sat down, and in a breath composed the first act of his piece with a maniacal fury, and in the midst of tears ! He continued at the work with the same eagerness day after day. In two months the rough draft was finished.

The progress he had made in Greek was of a kind that might justly fill him with pride. When it was known that he had written another "*Alcestis*," the secret of these concealed studies was disclosed to his friends. Their astonishment was only equalled by their admiration. The scholar of fifty years, as Alfieri called himself, was much gratified with his success. As a reward for his own industry, he bestowed upon himself a decoration invented by him specially for the occasion, and playfully styled himself Chevalier of the order of Homer. The decoration was a collar richly ornamented, upon which was engraved the names of twenty-three ancient and modern poets. A cameo representing Homer was attached, on the back of which was a distich in Greek. The collar is now preserved in the Fabre Museum at Montpellier. If no decorations were granted until as fairly earned as this, what a falling off there would be in the glitter of court suits ! It was while he was engaged in his Greek studies, that he had an interview with Charles Emmanuel IV., who had abdicated the Sardinian throne in December, 1798. Alfieri has alluded to this meeting in his "*Memoirs*," but a fresher source supplies us with additional details. When Count Solar della Margarita visited Rome in 1816, he went to see the old king, then become novice in a Jesuit convent. The monarch related to him what had taken place upon the occasion. When Alfieri appeared, Charles Emmanuel said to him, alluding to his attacks against tyrants, "Behold the tyrant ; but

they have clipped my wings." "The tragic writer," said the king, "remained stupified, and knew not what to answer."

It must have been a strange sight to see the ardent worshipper of liberty face to face with the fallen representative of kingly power. We may well believe that Alfieri was profoundly affected, and that all his gentler feelings were called into play. He says himself, that he experienced a desire to serve the dethroned king; that he would have offered his assistance had he believed it could in any way be of service. But it could not be.

Alfieri had now commenced leading a thoroughly studious life. He employed his time in methodically arranged occupations, which he followed with exactness. Each day had its appointed tasks. On Monday and Tuesday he studied the Bible. On Wednesday and Thursday, Homer. The Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, were devoted to Pindar and the other Greek poets. Not until he had completed, every day, the fixed amount of study allotted to each subject, did he take up his pen for original composition. He had grown a willing disciple of Rule. The strong, impetuous temperament, which in earlier years had revolted against even the slightest control, was now so calmed by age and study, that it submitted without a murmur to the most rigorous self-government.

Alfieri did not pursue his studies without interruption. In the March of 1799 the French entered Tuscany, and seized upon Florence. Alfieri's household was for the time broken up. He retired to Montughi, where, by renewed application to his books and to literary composition, he endeavoured to forget the events taking place around him. It required a strong effort to do this. His situation was not without danger. The opinions he

held were known. His social position rendered him conspicuous. Numerous arrests had taken place. Young men of the best families in Florence had been snatched from their beds in the dead of night, detained as hostages, or sent away to the prisons of the islands of St. Margaret. Alfieri had reason to fear a similar fate. He was fully prepared for the worst, and had determined not to surrender, or allow himself to be surprised. Every night he went to bed, arms within reach, quite determined to resist, to the death, any attack that might be made upon him. Fortunately, however, he remained unmolested; and the evacuation of Florence by the French in the following year, left him at liberty to return to his own house. Another occupation by the French took place soon after, but he did not leave the city.

It was during this last invasion of the French, that his dislike for that nation was illustrated by an incident that speaks perhaps more for his patriotism than for his good breeding. The French general, Miollis, who was in command at Florence, being fond of letters, wished to make the acquaintance of Alfieri. He called upon him several times, but without being able to obtain the favour he sought. The poet obstinately refused to show himself. Not discouraged by his ill-success, the general wrote to Alfieri, begging to be informed the day and hour at which he would be visible. This was a communication demanding a reply. Alfieri gave one at once. If the general, he said, commanded his presence, he would obey the order immediately; but, if the general merely wished to gratify his own private curiosity, he must beg to be excused from appearing. Alfieri has scarcely done justice to the reply this epistle brought him. He gives us the body of the answer, without its spirit. The original letter, which is preserved

in the Fabre Museum at Montpellier, is admirable for its terseness. "Having read the tragedies of Vittorio Alfieri," says the general, "I thought the author a different man than he is, and I wished to see him. Now that I know his nature, I no longer have that desire." Evidently French spirit was a match for Italian spleen.

The correspondence which passed upon this subject is oddly enough marked, in Alfieri's own writing, as a "Dialogue between a lion in a cage, and his crocodile guardian."

As if all his later annoyances were to issue from one source, and his hatred against the changes which had taken place in France to increase rather than diminish, the next cloud which cast a shadow over his tranquillity came from the banks of the Seine.

When flying from Paris, he had been compelled to leave behind him a number of his works, printed but not published. These works had been seized and confiscated. He had applied for them in vain. Fearing lest they might be published, and that the opinions they expressed would cause him to be confounded with the republican party, which he so detested, he inserted in all the journals of Italy a formal warning to the public against any edition of his writings, except that he had himself issued. This rather childish advertisement may have had some influence in Italy; in France it was so utterly disregarded, that, towards the close of 1799, a Parisian bookseller announced the confiscated and other writings for publication at the commencement of the following year. Alfieri at once renewed his advertisements in the Italian journals. For some time, however, he was so overcome with chagrin, that even his studies afforded him no relief. He shrunk with horror from identification with the cause of French republicanism;

from association with men for whom he could find no better terms than scoundrels, slaves, and apes. He wrote in the most eager manner to the Abbot of Caluso, as we find in the letters to that friend which have been published in recent years. He asked the Abbot as to the probable effect of the Paris edition upon his reputation. Caluso consoled Alfieri as well as he was able. Taking an illustration from English literary history, he reminded him that Milton had written in favour of the execution of Charles I., and yet was admired by people who looked upon that monarch as a martyr. Let us hope that the Abbot's words carried balm to the wounds they were intended to heal. Let us hope that his sympathy relieved the distress of Alfieri. He can hardly expect much sympathy from us. The ardent republican in agony lest he should be accused of aiding other republicans, whose only fault was that they were a trifle more ardent than himself, is not a sight strongly calculated to move our pity. Another feeling, closely akin to it, is in far more danger of being roused.

The only personal circumstance in Alfieri's life connected with the Revolution in France, which claims our sympathy, is the change produced in his means and in those of the Countess by that Revolution. It is a point upon which he dwells but little himself, and we gather small information from other sources. When he and the Countess returned to Florence, he tells us that they had enough to live upon decently, although they had lost a great part of their wealth. The property he possessed in the French funds was confiscated. The Countess's income, derived from the French Government, doubtless shared the same fate. The changes which took place evidently affected her more than himself. We know that in his will he left all he possessed to



the Countess, because, as he said, her circumstances required it. He had promised to bequeath something to his sister's children, but he apologises for not doing so on this ground. He gave permission to the Countess, in a letter written shortly before his death, and the original of which is in the Fabre Museum, to dispose of certain of his unpublished works, should poverty or any other motive induce her to do so. "I cannot and will not hinder one I so much love, from adopting any means which can diminish her poverty." We may conclude, therefore, that though, according to Alfieri's own statement, the peace of 1801 relieved them from an embarrassment they had felt for the five preceding years, it did not quite reinstate them in their former position. Alfieri was able, however, to buy four horses at the end of the year, acting upon a suggestion of the Countess, who wished him to ride for the sake of his health. His health, alas ! soon had need of more care than he could be prevailed upon to give to it.

## CHAP. XVIII.

## ILLNESS AND DEATH.

THE excitement caused by the publication of his works in Paris having somewhat subsided, Alfieri's thoughts again turned towards dramatic writing. He had firmly resolved to compose no more tragedies, but comedy he had not shut himself out from. He was seized with the desire of making an attempt in this form of literary composition. He commenced acting upon that desire with all his usual ardour, conceiving at once the plan of six comedies. He developed them as rapidly. Six days was all the time he devoted to each.

Such violent mental exertion could not fail to be attended with disastrous results. He was attacked by a severe illness, which compelled him to suspend his labours for many months. When quite restored, he resumed them with eagerness, and finished the versification of the comedies. This was towards the end of the year 1802.

It was almost the last literary occupation of his life. With the exception of his "Memoirs," which he carried up to May, 1803, he wrote no more. Neither those memoirs nor his comedies did he consider as finished works. He was yet engaged in correcting and publishing them; in arranging also future plans of study, when he was again taken ill. Shattered by over-exertion and recent

sickness, he would nevertheless have recovered from his attack, had he allowed himself sufficient repose and leisure. But study had now become a mistress whose fascinations he could not resist. Long before he was sufficiently re-established in health, he was again at his books or his comedies. He had adopted, too, a most meagre diet as a cure for the gout and an impaired digestion, from which he had for some time suffered. So far from curing these complaints, it tended to augment them.

It was in vain that the fond woman who had now been his companion through so many varying years, toward whom his affection grew in force, year by year; it was in vain that she entreated him to take the rest of which he had so much need, and to change a diet which was robbing him of strength every day, and leading him, ghastly and emaciated, to the very portals of the tomb. He would change in nothing. He was impelled by an impulse he could not resist to finish the comedies he had so carefully laboured at. He feared, with a kind of prophetic penetration, that Death would snatch them unfinished from his hands.

It was even as he feared. On the 3rd of October, only four months after he had put the last line to his "Memoirs," his half-recovered health fairly gave way. He had been very well in the morning, and when afternoon came, went out to take his usual drive. No sooner had he left the house, however, than he was attacked with fever; the gout flew at the same time to his stomach. For some hours he was completely prostrated. On the morrow his condition improved. He descended to the dining-room, but without being able to eat. The next day brought another favourable change, and, but for the rain, he would have driven out in the ordinary manner.

On the following morning, however, came a reaction. His maladies returned with renewed force. At night they had become so violent, that, to relieve him, mustard poultices were ordered to his feet. Scarcely had they begun to produce a favourable effect, than he tore them off. He feared that, if continued, they would prevent him walking ! He little knew how near the end of life's journey he was ; how few steps more he had to take ! By the next day, blisters and baths were ordered for his feet. But he refused to use them. He feared, as before, that they would hinder him from leaving his chamber. At night opium was administered to him to procure repose. It brought but a troubled sleep and a waking dream full of strange images and rambling thought. His mind had begun to be obscured behind the black curtains that death was closing around it. His speech was wild and feverish. Now he would speak of the labours of his life, and now of his studies, as Memory returned to her favourite haunts. Then with a strange power, snatched, as it were, from Death, he repeated many verses from a poem he had read only once.

At early morning on the 8th of October, the Countess, who had remained by his bedside all the night, quitted him for a short time. When she returned, she found him breathing heavily and with great pain. He had insisted, it has been said, against the advice of his physicians, on taking some medicine unsuited to his complaint. It gave the last blow to his already exhausted frame. The fond being who so much loved him, had returned just as life was passing away. "He grew weaker," she touchingly says, describing these last moments ; "he lost his sight, and died, without fever, like a bird, without agony ; without knowing it."

Priests had arrived, wishing to render him the last

consolations of the church. But before they could do so, he raised his eyes, made a movement of his head, and was no more. We have this on the authority of the Countess herself. Even without such testimony, we might well discredit the absurd stories of his sudden conversion on the bed of death, which credulous report has circulated.

Shortly before his death, he had written a letter to the Countess, which we have before alluded to, containing full instructions as to the way in which his MSS. were to be disposed of. He gave her full power to print, if she pleased, all his works. But, unless necessity compelled it, he did not wish his translations to be so treated. His "Memoirs" might, he thought, be published; for although he looked upon them as prolix works, full of many trivialities, yet he considered them not entirely useless as records of his disposition. If the Countess did not make use of his works, he wished them to be burnt rather than fall into other hands.

In person Alfieri was tall and commanding, with a face of much intelligence. His forehead was broad and lofty; his red hair fell in thick masses around it. He had the look of one born to command, rather than to obey.

He was buried in the Westminster Abbey of Florence, the church of Santa Croce,—*il Panteon di Firenze*, as the Florentines proudly call it. There, between the tombs of Michael Angelo and Macchiavelli, surrounded by men whose names will survive long after the stones, upon which they are sculptured, have crumbled into dust, Alfieri's monument arises. It is a richly adorned sarcophagus of white marble. Italy, represented by a female figure, is weeping, over the funereal urn, the loss of her poet-son. Upon a medallion in the middle of

the urn is sculptured a portrait of Alfieri. It is a faithful and striking likeness. The monument was finished in 1810.

If the genius of Canova has not proclaimed itself there so fully as in other of his works, affection will excuse the omission. Canova loved the man whose tomb he has chiselled. He was intimate with him; enjoyed his friendship. May not grief have dimmed his eyes, and rendered his hand unsteady? There is no wrong in such a thought.

Alfieri had prepared an epitaph for himself in Latin, some time before his death, but it was not placed upon his tomb. In its stead, is a short and simple inscription, telling by whom the monument was erected. "Louisa, Princess of Stolbergh, Countess of Albany, to Vittorio Alfieri, of Asti, 1810." Round the portrait in the centre of the monument are these words: "Vittorio Alfieri, of Asti."

The faithful woman who had shared Alfieri's fortunes for so many years was profoundly afflicted at his loss. Year by year love had united them more closely in its embrace. Their tastes, their dispositions, their hearts, all were in harmony. Alfieri lost no opportunity of testifying the regard in which he held his companion, and of acknowledging the debt of gratitude, of affection, and of esteem he owed her. *La Mia Donna*, is the term by which he always speaks of her. Without her friendship, he said, he should have done nothing great or good. She was the anchor of his life.

That he, wayward and impetuous as he was, was equally dear to her, we have abundant proofs. In a letter written by her from which we have already quoted, and which of itself is a rich addition to the memoirs Alfieri has left us, we find a touching, yet simple description of the grief she experienced at his death. It



was written in French two months after that event. A copy of it in the handwriting of Signor D'Anse de Villoison, to whom the original was addressed, is preserved in the Library at Parma. "I was quite certain," says the Countess, "you would take a great interest in the horrible loss I have sustained. You know, by experience, what it is to lose a person with whom we have lived for twenty-six years, who has never given us a moment of displeasure, whom we have always adored, respected, and venerated. I am the most unhappy creature in existence. I have lost all interest in everything. I have lost my consolation, my society. I am alone in a world which has become odious to me. The greatest happiness, and the sole, that can arrive to me, would be to go and rejoin that incomparable friend. He killed himself by study and labour. \* \* \*

"Ah! Monsieur, what an affliction! I have lost all. It is as though my heart had been torn from me. I cannot yet persuade myself that I shall see him no more. Remember that for ten years I had never once quitted him—that we passed our days together—I was by his side when he worked. I exhorted him not to fatigue himself so much; but it was in vain; his ardour for study and labour increased every day, and he sought, by occupying himself continually, to forget the circumstances of the time. His mind was always inclined towards serious objects, and this country afforded him no amusement. I shall always reproach myself for not having forced him to take a journey; it would have diverted him in spite of himself. His ardent soul could exist no longer in a body that it undermined continually. He is happy; all his misfortunes are at an end; his glory will go on increasing. I alone have lost him; he was the happiness of my life. I can no longer occupy myself with anything. My time was always too short. I used to read,

at the least, seven or eight hours a day. Now my books seem odious to me. I can no longer look upon them.

“Pardon me for talking thus to you of my sorrow. I know that you have some friendship for me, and that you loved that incomparable friend. This is why I give myself up to my grief with you. \* \* \*

“I have no changes in contemplation. I live from day to day, happy when I have finished one, and in despair when I commence another. Death would be for me true happiness. I detest life, the world, and all that therein is. I lived for one sole object, and I have lost it. Adieu, my dear Monsieur. Pity me, for I am very unhappy. I cannot tear myself from the spot where I lived with him and where he now reposes.”

Long after time had softened this grief,—so tenderly, so pathetically described,—the Countess continued to keep the lost one fresh in her memory. When, in 1817, Madame Albrizzi went to Florence, she visited the house Alfieri had inhabited. The Countess still lived there, and had religiously preserved his apartment in its ancient state, in order that she might believe its former owner was only temporarily absent. Still later, when another distinguished woman, Lady Morgan, arrived in Florence, she found the Countess ever faithful to the memories of the past. Nothing can be more interesting than the account which Lady Morgan gives us of the fond woman. She still preserved much of that beauty which Alfieri had so well described years before. She read a great deal, and had a warm taste for the Fine Arts. Her spirits were as fresh as in the spring-time of youth. Her conversation was full of life and animation. She was still the Queen of Florence. Her house was one of the most celebrated of the city. Once a week a numerous company assembled there.

Her reception of the English lady was most cordial. She welcomed her with almost sisterly regard. Nothing gave her greater pleasure than to speak of Alfieri. She recalled the incidents of his life and death, of his labours and his leisure, in words of touching simplicity very different from the language ascribed to her by many tourists, and with an interest which showed with what fondness she clung to the old sentiment. It was not long ere the golden threads which bound her to it were broken. On the 29th of January, 1824, when she had reached the age of seventy-two years and four months, she died.

Upon her death, the Manuscripts of Alfieri which she possessed were removed to the Library at Florence. She had originally intended to leave them to the Brera Library of Milan, and had disposed of them thus in her will. But it appeared unjust to deprive Alfieri's adopted city of such relics. At the instance of Signor Francesco Tassi, the Countess changed her resolution, and bequeathed them to Florence.

Alfieri had expressed a wish that she might lie by his side. This wish was fulfilled. She was buried in the church of Santa Croce. A monument was erected to her, in its chapel of the Holy Sacrament, by M. Fabre. He is said to have looked upon her with enamoured eyes, even to the latest moment of her life. An inscription in Latin is placed upon her monument. It is that composed by Alfieri, except that the lines commemorating his love are omitted. They are separated no more! They rest together!

Let us bend softly over their tombs, and breathe a hope that the two loving hearts are united beyond the grave, even as they were united on its earthly side.

## CHAP. XIX.

## COMMENT AND CONCLUSION.

WE have followed Alfieri through his whole career; we have followed him to the tomb: now that all is hushed and quiet, let us pause and look back upon the events of his life. How strange and contradictory they appear! What weakness and what strength of character they illustrate! We see him now a slave to the wildest passions; now trampling upon them like a conqueror. We see him at one moment prostrated in the very dust of ignorance; at the next he is climbing to the loftiest intellectual heights. We see him now in tears of tenderness; now in transports of fury; now with all a woman's softness; now rugged as the savage. He is the enemy of Tyranny in one breath, and in another he is the enemy of those who strive to crush it. His nature was made up of opposites.

Let us not, however, dwell with too much importance upon this circumstance. Are not we all composed of diverse qualities? Is not each disposition as varied in its attributes as the changing seasons of Time? We are the same beings we were a year, a month, a week ago: the same, and yet how different! Each day shows us under a new phase. The passions of humanity have been fairly divided amongst us. Some we may have developed; some we may have neglected; some parade

themselves unnecessarily; others will scarcely appear, even when summoned. But they are all within. One single man is the representative of all the crimes and of all the good deeds that have ever disgraced or glorified the world. We notice Alfieri, because he is high up above upon the mountain. If we looked among ourselves down in the valley, we should find the same features.

One great misfortune, which happened to Alfieri, and which explains, though it does not justify, many of the excesses of his life, was to be left master of his fortunes at such an early age. What a pernicious Rule that must have been, which allowed a young noble so dangerous a privilege! Nobles even more advanced in years are not always remarkable, as we know, for the judgment and high taste with which they employ their means. But a lad of fourteen, left master of wealth which must have seemed inexhaustible, and which was far indeed from trifling! What could be expected under such circumstances? It is only a marvel that Alfieri did not utterly sink under that load of riches. It is only a marvel that he did not grow into vice ere manhood stamped itself upon his brow; that, passing through the various stages of voluptuous pleasure, he did not step from the libertinism of the Spanish profligate to the sickly immorality of a Louis Quinze; and become a weak, emaciated, miserable old man, while other men were yet only in their prime. But in the midst of all his weakness, he was strong; and the tendency of that strength was towards good, rather than evil.

Perhaps the greatest misfortune which befel Alfieri, was to be born into a station which the circumstances of his time and country rendered false and unprofitable. There was no field for his ambition. He was meant for

a great country; he was the citizen of a petty kingdom. A life of activity was what his being craved for; he found himself doomed to a life of sloth, or to puerile movement more irksome and even less dignified. The curse of labour would have been to him a true blessing. His energy was irresistible. Look with what haste, after quitting college, he ran courier-like over Europe! How incessantly he travelled! If his steps were stayed for an instant, was he not actively employed? Even when, a slave to fiery affection, he seemed most still, his mind was a whirlwind. His passions were breaking at his heart with the fury of storm waves breaking against the shore. That life he led at Turin, when the source of all healthy action was choked by an impure love, was it all an idle life? Was it not rather a time of unceasing but profitless activity; a fierce struggle of the emotions, until the enemy was expelled? Then, when victory was gained, with what activity he applied himself to his literary tasks! Most men would have taken many a long and grateful rest from such wearying labour. But he needed no rest. Idle moments were not for him. If he ceased to act, he ceased to live.

Look at him again, a step further on in his career, when he had tasted, perhaps for the first time, all the intoxicating delights of a steadfast love. Did they enervate him? Did he nurse himself in the lap of beauty, and, closing his eyes to the outer world, pass into that land of tuneful thought and idle fancy, into which even the strongest of us, let us hope, have sometimes allowed ourselves to dreamily wander? No. The breath of love that blew upon his cheek, was as the sweet breeze that brings new life to the worn and wearied traveller of the desert. It was an encouragement to him, an assistance; henceforth, he went for-



ward with a firmer foot than before. Nothing seems to me to illustrate so completely the untiring activity of Alfieri's disposition, as the effect upon him of his love for the Countess of Albany, when circumstances enabled him to express and gratify it. The strongest passions of most men, similarly situated, would have melted, for the time at least, into the one master passion, under the glow of that sunny affection. Few men but would have been idlers from active duty with such a fascinating being for fellow truant. But with Alfieri, she was an incitement to new exertion, rather than a hindrance. Love to him was as a war clarion, not a dulcet lute. He was invigorated, stimulated by it; not soothed into a voluptuous sleep.

True, when the storm came on,—when he had no longer the bright star to guide him,—he was feeble and helpless; prostrated upon the shore without energy to rise. But what man, who earnestly loved, would not have been thus wrecked? Great happiness entails great sorrow. It is the only way a fair balance can be struck in this world. Merely to be separated from the being held most dear is a torturing pain. The vainest and the most modest of us must alike experience this. We cannot feel secure when all is uncertainty. Indifference alone is confident. Affection is always trembling. The woman we do not fear for, we do not love.

Who can doubt that, under other and happier circumstances, Alfieri would have passed through a very different career. In England, for instance, he might have risen to the highest offices in the state, ruled the destinies of the country with a firm hand, and left a glorious name to enrich that country's annals. In old Rome, or Greece, he might have declaimed against the tyranny of Power, fought for the cause of liberty, and

have become a Brutus or a Timoleon. But in Piedmont, in Italy, there was nothing for him to do but bend the knee in slavery, or mourn for the lost freedom of his nation in solitude and silence.

It is a striking proof of his great power, that, in despite of these circumstances of birth and position, he succeeded in earning a reputation which placed him among the great names of our age. When he had once found a vocation, he devoted himself to it with all the ardour of a master mind. He did not pause or take breath, until he had carried out the project he had in view. Let us briefly glance at his labours. They invite us now to give them our attention ere we close the page.

When Alfieri first turned his glance towards the Italian stage, it presented, as he has indicated to us, anything but a hopeful aspect. The degradation of a people enslaved under a foreign yoke, and without political life, could not fail to make itself felt in the theatre as in the more extended arena of public affairs. No high effort of Mind could be born amid such circumstances. A stage without authors soon ceases to have actors. When actors and authors both are wanting, an audience will not easily be found. Thus it was, thus it had been in Italy through many troubled years. The opera,—the seductive, but enervating opera,—carried to great perfection by Metastasio, was almost alone in possession of the popular taste. When Thought is forbidden, when it is hunted and goaded and tortured wherever seen, some such result as this must happen. People, prohibited the use of their intellectual powers, are yet unable to stifle those powers: they must cajole and divert them; lead them far away from the broad highways of reflection, into the bye paths of purposeless

fancy. What more calculated to do this than the syren strains which fill the air at the bidding of the musician's hand?

We need not proscribe one of the most delightful of all amusements. We need not say a single harsh word to that tuneful Muse who discourses to us in such sweet sounds. We need not drive her from our homes, that she so often makes happy. Let us foster and cherish her! Let us listen to her when the day is over, and the work is done, and we are gathered with our wives and children round the hearth. She will beckon away many sad thoughts from our minds; strengthen and yet purify our hearts; link us closer to those we love. But let us not bow down before her, and make her a Divinity. Let us not leave our duties unfulfilled, that we may listen to her melodious tones. We shall grow idle and useless if we do; slaves instead of masters, depend upon it. It will not do, in this life, to devote ourselves too exclusively to one object, be that object business or pleasure. We shall lose rather than gain, if we do. Walking is good; but the man who should do nothing but walk through a long life, would arrive at very doubtful distinction when the end of his journey was reached.

Alfieri's first thought was to improve the taste of his countrymen, by blending the amusement they were accustomed to with something better. He conceived a species of drama—*tramelogedia* was the name he invented for it—which should combine the attractions of opera with some of the excellences of tragedy. In this view he laid out the plan of six pieces, which were to be the pioneers of the reform he ultimately intended to introduce. But how could such a disposition as Alfieri's be favourable to half measures? How could such an impetuous nature as his, wait patiently through the slow

progress of gradual change? It was not possible. In a short time he had abandoned his projected pieces. Only one escaped the general fate, and that he did not finish until an advanced period of his literary career.

Instead of attempting reform by easy stages, he determined to attempt everything at once. He even added to his intentions; gave his purpose a higher and a wider range. It was something more than an improvement of the Stage that he attempted: it was the improvement of his countrymen; the regeneration of his country! He had great hope of Italy. He describes somewhere a Republic, and predicts that his country will at some future time obtain such a one. He had faith in the ardour and strength of the Italian heart. It would one day be stirred by the noblest impulses, and throb with the life of Liberty. He devoted himself, therefore, to his double task, with a firmness of purpose and fulness of power that few obstacles could check. Taking the Greek writers for his model, he followed with scrupulous exactness in their steps, binding himself down to the severest rules of antiquity, and never allowing his imagination to wander beyond. Not an action, not a phrase, did he introduce unnecessarily. He took credit to himself for a completeness that could suffer no curtailings. From other tragedies whole lines might be lost without obscuring the action. In his, not a single verse could be omitted without injury to the rest. Every thought was expressed in the fewest possible words. It was one of the reproaches most frequently directed against him by his contemporaries, that in attempting to be concise he often became obscure.

Throughout nearly all his tragedies and his prose works, the leading idea by which he was animated stood plainly out. Several pieces he specially calls tragedies of

liberty. They well deserve the name. He never tired in his denunciations of tyranny, in his invectives against oppression. These were themes upon which the more he spoke, the more eloquent he became. Even when his voice faltered, and his words failed him, he was still sustained by faith in his power, by faith in his purpose. One of his tragedies which he admits to be defective, he would not, he says, wish unwritten. It would assist the cause of Liberty, although not so much as it might have done. Better, however, little help than none at all.

France, which Alfieri so much loathed, has never yet known how to forgive him this sentiment, or to appreciate fairly his life and genius. There is in that country an under current of criticism, which still sets strongly against him. A high authority having pronounced adversely to him, other authorities have followed the same course. Napoleon, who had such warm praises for tragedy, written by Corneille, could find nothing favourable to say of it when written by Alfieri. "La tragédie," said he, "échauffe l'âme, élève le cœur, peut et doit, créer des héros. Sous ce rapport, peut-être, la France doit à Corneille une partie de ses belles actions; aussi, messieurs, s'il vivait, je le ferais prince." He would have made no prince, however, of Alfieri. When M. Pierre Didot brought under the Imperial attention his edition of the Italian poet's works, Napoleon sharply interrupted him. "Don't talk to me of your editions," said he. "Look! here is the *Bard* of Monti. See how they print in Italy!"

Monti had more attractions for Napoleon than Alfieri. No wonder! The latter had written against tyrants; the former had sung in praise of the Corsican Conqueror. Other critics show themselves quite as partial in their judgment. One writer can find no better cause for

Alfieri's hatred to the French, than his loss of "1500 volumes bound in calf." Another accuses him of inciting the sottish Count of Albany to drink, in order to rob him of his wife. Another patronisingly speaks of one of his works, as having had "the glory of being imitated on the French stage." A fourth can find nothing in his *Mirra*, but an imitation of Racine's *Phédre*; and so on. Charges of imitation are most frequent. He is accused of having founded his tragedies upon those of the French school. But the charge is not worth bringing forward. There is no more resemblance between them than that which arises between two pupils who have studied the same model. Such criticism is unworthy of France.

Alfieri predicted that Italy would some day be free; that Italians would again enjoy the liberty of thought and speech. He predicted equally that the Stage, either by his means or by the means of others, would rise to the intellectual eminence it ought to attain, and that opera, narrowed to its own proper limits, would no longer usurp the place of tragedy. The one weakens and lowers the mind, the other strengthens it. A free nation would never place the two on an equal footing. If his words have not yet been realised,—if Italy is still enslaved, and the opera still maintains its sway,—let us not look upon him as a false prophet, or dim his words with doubt. He has already done much. We know that in a few years after his death, eighteen editions of his works had passed through the press. We know that two great theatres, one at Milan, the other at Bologna, were erected by the hands of amateurs anxious to represent his tragedies. So completely, indeed, did they enter the public mind, that even artisans, many of whom could not read, but who nevertheless contrived to commit those tragedies to memory, banded together for the same purpose. His



thoughts have vibrated throughout all Italy. "The influence of his writings," as says the author to whom I have already expressed my acknowledgments, "has been immense ; far greater perhaps in the rest of the peninsula than in his own country. He gave tone not only to the language which he was not born to speak, but to the character of a people to which he scarcely belonged. He wound up the Italian mind to a higher pitch than it had ever reached since the old Republican times."

If Alfieri has had no successors entitled to take rank by his side, he has at least given inspiration to many who have gained no unworthy fame. But obstacles have been in their path, whenever they have sought to rise to the heights of Liberty. Alfieri himself is not wholly free. He does not speak with full voice. He is looked upon unfavourably by Authority and Power.

But even now, perhaps, the brighter day is breaking which will lead to the morrow of his promise.

Let us all hope so ; for it will indeed be a bright day for Italy.



# CARLO GOLDONI.

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## INTRODUCTORY.

WE pass from the tragic to the comic writer. The events of their lives indicate the character of the men. In the former, we have had to deal with incidents harmonious to the nature of the subject. There is a tendency towards tragedy throughout all the life of Alfieri. The gloom of a great, but, in many respects, a morbid mind throws its shadow over nearly every circumstance. Death always seems lurking near. Every footstep may be the indication of his approach. We must, even in spite of ourselves, be thoughtful while in the presence of Alfieri. We feel that we are in the company of one who enforces silence and attention. It is no time for smiling. We have to do with a man too remarkable, even in his foibles, to be judged lightly; too commanding in his merits, to be looked upon without high regard. We leave him full of those suggestive thoughts which drive out for awhile all the old established settlers, and found a new colony of mental emotion. It is a mood from which we may not unfairly seek relief, by turning aside and joining hands with a less exalted companion.

Let us tarry for awhile with Goldoni. We shall at once be at ease with him. There will be no opposing currents to mislead us when we try to fathom the depths of his mind. His passions and his sentiments will all be within easy reach. He will chat and gossip with us ; will tell us his history ; and our features will more frequently unbend with lively interest, than grow rigid with stern attention. If we do not find him a hero, or a man apart, we shall find him by no means an uninteresting companion. We shall glide with him down the course of his career, as we might glide, in a little boat, down some winding and pleasant river, on a summer trip. We shall touch at many agreeable landing places ; we shall see many pretty views : now and then a dull cloud will throw a shadow over our way ; but the sun will break out again, and we shall go on, merry and light-hearted as before. If, as we draw near the great ocean, the waters grow troubled and the sky becomes dark, we ought not to be unprepared for such a change. How many a bright sunny day leads to a gloomy night ! Let us be of good cheer. Goldoni's sad hours were few. Old and weary, feeble and exhausted, he was soon hushed to sleep.

## CHAPTER I.

## BOYHOOD.

CARLO GOLDONI was born in Venice, at the house of his grandfather, in the year 1707. The father and grandfather of Goldoni lived together. The latter, after losing his first wife, had united himself to a widow; to one of her daughters he at the same time married his son. Goldoni's grandfather was a man fond of pleasure and display. He had hired, of the Duke of Massa-Carrara, a country house situated a few miles from the city. The gay company he attracted there excited the envy of one of his neighbours, who endeavoured to eject him from the place. But Goldoni was not a man to be thus beaten. He went to Carrara and made an agreement by which he obtained the right of farming all the estates the Duke possessed in the territory of Venice. Returning home to celebrate this victory, he launched out into fresh gaieties and fresh expenses. He gave entertainments to all the actors and musicians of the city; he had representations of plays and operas in his own house; a stream of gay company was always flowing towards his open doors. Goldoni may be said to have been born upon that stream, and to have been floated down it towards the direction he was to take in after life.

The lad soon became a great favourite in the double household. Everybody was delighted with him; every-

body strove to add to his happiness. When he was only four years of age, his father made him a present of a little theatre of marionnettes, and superintended the performance himself. The boy gave the first evidence of dramatic taste by applauding the puppets with childish delight. Goldoni's grandfather, more intent upon amusement and society than upon the welfare of those around him, had sadly neglected the education of his son, and, dying in 1712, left that son unable to enter upon any occupation by which he might earn a living. He had, however, some property at Modena and at Venice. This was a support to him until he could qualify himself for a regular profession.

It was necessary to do so at once. Another son had been born to him. There was another mouth to feed. Undecided as to the course he should pursue, he went to Rome. While there, he was advised to study medicine. He resolved to act upon this suggestion. At the end of four years he was received as a qualified professor of the healing art.

The mother and her two children remained, during these four years, at Venice. The younger child was sent away to nurse; Carlo was kept at home. He was still the favourite with his mother, who felt proud of the quickness he displayed. When only four years of age he was able to read and write, and, if we may credit his own words, he was "gentle, tranquil, and obedient." What more was wanting to charm a fond mother's heart? She gave him a tutor; she encouraged him by her approval; she threw open to him the library of his father, in which he read a collection of comic and pathetic plays with all the eagerness of a young and ardent student. So fully was he impregnated with this exciting literature, that at the age of eight years he had



the boldness to write a comedy ; going thus in advance of Metastasio, whose first tragedy was written at fourteen !

Shown at first with much fear and trembling to his nurse, it passed next into the hands of his mother. We may imagine with what favour she regarded it. The "Mandragora" of Macchiavelli, or the "Calandria" of Bibbiena, could not have appeared to her half so meritorious. She despatched the baby comedy to her husband, just then commencing his first medical experiences at Perugia. The father, pleased by the talent of his little son, sent for him to that town. To gratify the lad's evident taste for the dramatic art, he organised an amateur company of performers, and caused a stage to be constructed for their representations. Young Goldoni was entrusted with a woman's part. He seems to have been no more fitted for it than Tiberio Fiurelli might, as a youth, have been fitted for Sophonisba. Nevertheless, Goldoni, in common with all the other performers, was almost blinded by the boxes of sugar-plums thrown in token of approval upon the stage. In a short time he was joined by his mother, who could not bear to be separated from her darling son. The air of the place not suiting her constitution, fresh movements of the family took place.

Madame Goldoni went to Chiozza, a town about eight miles from Venice, the climate of which was analogous to that of her native city ; Goldoni's father set out for Modena ; and Goldoni himself was sent to Rimini to study medicine. Here he fell ill of the small-pox. While recovering, he deserted his medical studies for the more attractive reading furnished by the works of Terence, Plautus, Aristophanes, and Menander. Here, too, he made the acquaintance of a company of comedians, whose performances he frequented. In these he

saw, for the first time, women appear upon the stage. At that period this was prohibited in all the States of the Pope, except the three Legations.

The comedians were his fellow-townspeople. They welcomed him warmly; he neglected his studies for these attractive acquaintances; when the day for their departure drew near, he was inconsolable. They were going to Chiozza. A thought struck him! Why should he not go there too, and see his mother? She had grieved much at parting with him, and would no doubt give him an open-armed welcome. The comedians applauded the idea, and invited him to a seat in their boat. He could not resist this, but determined to undertake the voyage. He was, however, under the guardianship of a friend of the family, who of course opposed this excursion in such dangerous company. No matter. Goldoni, with true filial devotion, had made up his mind to visit his mother. Nothing could turn him from his resolution. On the morning appointed for the departure of the company, he hastened on board, hid himself under the prow of the boat, and in a short time bade adieu to Rimini.

The comedians seem to have treated Goldoni as generously as D'Assoucy was treated by the actors of the *Illustre Théâtre*. He found himself in the midst of a pleasant but somewhat mixed company. There were in the boat six actors, the same number of actresses, a prompter, a machinist, a property man, eight servants, four chambermaids, nurses, children of all ages, dogs, cats, apes, parrots, pigeons and other birds, and a lamb. It was Noah's Ark on a small scale.

The boat was very large; there were many compartments in it; each lady passenger had a little niche apart, screened by curtains. A bed had been arranged for

Goldoni, by the side of the director. Everybody was comfortable, if we make allowance for the annoyance which all received at the hands of the leading "young lady" of the company. Exceedingly ugly, she was in consequence very hard to please. She was continually wanting something that could not be obtained for her, and flew into a violent passion because she did not get it. Yet, with all this, the voyage flew by pleasantly enough, and was no doubt amusing indeed to Goldoni.

Arrived at Chiozza, he went, together with the director of the company, to the house of his mother. He fell on his knees before her, made her acquainted with the motive which had induced him to quit Rimini, and prayed for forgiveness. He did not long remain in doubt as to his fate. His mother, only too happy to see her first-born again, attempted faintly to censure him for his misconduct, but her maternal feelings overcame her; in another moment she had clasped him in her arms. But there was still something to be dreaded,—the anger of his father when he should learn what had taken place. Unfortunately, too, the elder Goldoni had written, a few days previously, to announce his speedy arrival at Chiozza. Within a week he came. The lad pleaded guilty to the fault he had committed, but prayed so earnestly for forgiveness that the father could not withstand his eloquence. He was pardoned at once.

Previously to his arrival at Chiozza, the elder Goldoni had made arrangements to send his son to college at Pavia, which ranked then with Padua as a place of education. Some little time must elapse before he could be received there. During this interval he assisted his father in his professional pursuits. But medicine seems to have been as little to his liking as engraving was to Rousseau. It disgusted him. He grew moody,

melancholy, and thin. His mother questioned him as to the cause of this change. He confessed the truth to her, and she resolved that he should not follow a profession for which he evinced so much distaste. She suggested that he should study for the bar: the father consented; Goldoni was pleased. In a few days mother and son set out for Venice.

For a short time Goldoni was placed in the office of an attorney, his uncle Signor Indric, where he applied himself industriously to his duties. In hours of leisure he gratified his taste for the drama by attending the various theatres of the city. His uncle would have been glad to keep him longer; but a vacancy had occurred among the free scholars of the College of the Pope, at Pavia, and the place had been obtained for him. He left Venice, therefore, and soon arrived at his new home. It was necessary to wait some time for the letters and certificates which were to procure him entrance into the college. During this period he lodged in the house of one of the professors. A good library was thrown open to him. He used it, as may well be imagined, for other purposes than the study of jurisprudence. It contained a large collection of his favourite reading,—ancient and modern comedies. Upon these he fixed all his attention.

Three months thus passed away. It was these three months that gave a decided character to his taste for dramatic writing. He met, he tells us, with English plays, French plays, Spanish plays;—but none of Italy,—none, at least, worthy of the name. Here was a fine field for his ambition! Why should not he write, and endeavour to elevate the Italian Stage to the level of the others? Never doubt, that, boy as he was, he felt the power to do this at that time; and had opportunity offered, he would on the instant have applied himself

to the work. Who among us, strong in the delusive but delightful strength of youth, has not felt capable of similar achievements? Before we can well be trusted with a bodkin, we think ourselves capable of wielding a sword. We are tender as infants: we believe ourselves of patriarchal toughness. What after-reality can compare with the illusions of youth?

Goldoni's imaginary dramatic triumphs were soon brought to a close. The letters and certificates arrived.

Among the latter was his register of baptism. It showed him to be sixteen years of age. Eighteen was the youngest age at which students were admitted. What was to be done? It seemed, at first, an insurmountable obstacle. But it was overcome. Goldoni does not tell us by what means. He merely says that he went to bed one night, sound and well, and sixteen years of age. On the morrow, when he awoke, he found himself eighteen! What saint had performed the miracle he did not know.

Surely, surely, the same kind saint who so frequently aids decaying Beauty to defraud—but in quite another manner—honest old Father Time.

## CHAP. II.

## EARLY LIFE.

CLAD in ecclesiastical costume, and with his head shaved, Goldoni went very proudly from the college one day, to spend a four months' vacation with his mother at Chiozza. Delighted at seeing him under such an aspect, she welcomed him with affectionate eagerness, not unmixed with respect. The good lady evidently was no subscriber to the truth of the old French proverb, *l'habit ne fait pas le moine*. She could not but think that the garb in which her son was hidden, gave to him something of the sanctity with which it was associated. She prayed him to exert his influence to check the evil dispositions of his younger brother, an ill-conditioned lad of eleven years of age, who neglected school for the fishing-rod, fought like a fury, and laughed defiance of all around him.

While with his mother, Goldoni read Macchiavelli's "Mandragora," one of the earliest plays of the Italian stage. It was the first piece of the kind he had met with. No wonder that it made more than an ordinary impression upon his mind.

The four months spent in this and other agreeable occupations were soon over, and Goldoni returned to Pavia. During one of the vacations that followed, he gave proof of talent in a form of literary composition very different from that in which his first attempt in



authorship had been written. He was introduced to a young friend of his mother, an inmate of one of the convents. She prayed him to compose a sermon! He refused at first, feeling probably unfit for such an effort of mind; but yielding, at last, to the irresistible pressure of woman's persuasion, complied with the request. Fifteen days were occupied with the work. The sermon was given to a young abbot, by whom it was delivered, and with such good effect, that Goldoni, who was known to be the author, was rewarded with presents of brocades, lace, and sugar-plums, by the delighted ladies who had heard it.

Gratified by the flattering reception his performance had met with, he returned in high spirits to Pavia. A sad annoyance was in store for him there. On the morning after his arrival, he called at a house where he had been accustomed to visit. There was nobody at home. He made a call elsewhere, and with the same result. A third, was equally unsuccessful. He went the whole round of his acquaintance, but not one would see him. Astonished and angry, he hurried back to the college, and made known to his fellow-students the inhospitable treatment he had received. They soon enlightened him as to the cause of it. The citizens of Pavia had always entertained an aversion to the students. During the vacation then just terminated, they had come to a determination amongst themselves to exclude, from that time, the obnoxious young men from the society of the place. They had passed a solemn resolution, that in every house which received visits from these collegians, the young ladies of that house should never be sought in marriage by a citizen of Pavia. Mothers and daughters were in consternation. The collegians were worth something, but the citizens

were worth more. The hopes of matrimony could not be frustrated for the sake of a few young men, promising though they might be. Every door was pitilessly closed against them.

They determined upon vengeance, and fixed upon Goldoni as the instrument by which it was to be accomplished. He was known to possess poetical ability. He was solicited to write a satire against the unsocial citizens. Pleased with the opportunity of distinguishing himself, and of gratifying his revenge at the same time, he wrote the satire. It was the topic of the day in Pavia, when it appeared. Everybody read it, and everybody—excepting, of course, those attacked—enjoyed its humour and liveliness. Goldoni had taken no pains to conceal the names of the various individuals he ridiculed. He had sketched their peculiarities and their appearance, in colours that rendered the pictures recognisable everywhere. The citizens were furious. They ran in haste to the college; they insulted several of the scholars; they threatened Goldoni with death if he fell into their hands. Happily for him, he contrived to escape this punishment. But he received another, almost as disproportioned to the offence he had committed. He was expelled the college!

Overwhelmed with shame, sorrow, and remorse, he arrived at Chiozza. He had not the courage to face his mother. He prayed a monk, who had been his companion, to go before and intercede for him. The worthy man had not a difficult task. He was stopped in the midst of the entreaties for pardon which followed his explanations.

“Reverend father,” said the fond woman, “if my son had committed an act of dishonesty, I would never have looked upon him again. He has been merely

thoughtless, and I pardon him." The mother's forgiveness was thus easily obtained, but the father's was yet to be sought for. Would it be procured as easily? Goldoni feared not. He had but little time to wait in order to be put at ease upon this point. While they were yet at dinner, the father was announced. Goldoni flew from the room, leaving his place vacant. His father entered, and noticed the empty chair. He demanded an explanation; and, for answer, his son rushed into his arms. The story was soon told. Forgiveness at once followed it.

Goldoni had been, as already mentioned, accompanied to Chiozza by a monk. The parents of Goldoni were grateful, naturally enough, for the care this ecclesiastic had taken of their son. They did one or two kindly offices for him. He was affected by their goodness, and took an early opportunity of testifying so. He had in his possession, he told them one day, a piece of the stay-lace of the Virgin Mary. It was no ordinary stay-lace that! It worked miracles. Though of common thread, fire could not burn it. If cast into oil, the oil from that time had marvellous properties. It became a cure for all kinds of diseases.

The parents of Goldoni were of course highly anxious to see this precious relic. They collected a large number of their friends to see it also. A variety of pious preparations were made. The witch's caldron, we know, is not ready until the dead man's fingers have been thrown into it, and the incantations sung. At the end, the Holy stay-lace was produced. It was submitted to the ordeal by fire. Not a singe was visible. No doubt, of course, could exist of its sanctity. The spectators were in raptures of pious delight. They subscribed a sum of money, which they presented to the monk, to

pay for the masses he might need on the journey he was about to take. This done, they broke up, highly edified with what they had seen. The marvel was noised abroad and came to the ears of the bishop. He had mistrust, however, of an unauthorised miracle. He caused inquiries to be made upon the subject. By these it was discovered that the wonderful stay-lace was a cleverly painted piece of iron wire! The monk in the mean time had departed on his pious pilgrimage. All that remained to be done was to rebuke the Goldonis and their friends for having encouraged an impostor.

Goldoni's studies, though interrupted, were not to be discontinued. Pavia being no longer open to him, he went to Udine, where he was received by Signor Morelli, a celebrated lawyer, who was then giving a course of legal instruction to a "limited number" of pupils. Under this teacher he made rapid progress. In six months, he assures us, he had learnt more than in the three years he remained at Pavia.

The application which had brought about this result growing a little irksome, he felt himself in want of some relaxation. In this mood, it was not unnatural that he should fall in love with the first young lady who attracted his attention. The result of his experience in the tender passion was not agreeable. He followed the young lady to church; he followed her to the promenades; he made unmistakable signs with his hands and eyes to indicate the state of his heart: but he had not courage enough to speak! The maid-servant of the enchantress seemed a fitting medium through which to communicate his sentiments. He made her acquaintance. She suggested that a present would be the best way to win her mistress's heart. If he would buy one, she would undertake to deliver it. Straight to a jeweller's went

Goldoni, and bought the present suggested. The next day he had the pleasure of seeing it worn by the young lady. He fondly hoped then that his suit was won. But he was cruelly deceived. He soon discovered that mistress and maid had been in league together. Now that the jewel was obtained, they would have nothing more to say to him. It was evident that they were two sorry jades, intent only upon fooling the simple lad. He fell into a storm of rage, which fortunately carried clean away his love.

Not long after this adventure, he went to Goritz to join his father who was staying there as medical attendant to Count Lantieri, lieutenant-general in the Austrian service, and at that time suffering from illness. While recovering, the Count established in his house a little theatre of marionnettes, and gave the arrangements of it into the hands of young Goldoni. It was an appointment that delighted the law student. He revived a piece by Martelli, called the "Sneezing of Hercules," which had been written expressly for puppets. The wooden actors played their parts to perfection, creating infinite amusement in the household, and tending no doubt to restore the Count to health. In a short time, having no further need of medicine, he dismissed his attendant with a handsome recompense.

Goldoni's studies at Udine being finished, he accompanied his father to Chiozza, where a loving mother was waiting to receive him. It was arranged, at first, that all three should go to Milan, where the young student was to finish his education. But Goldoni's father held property in Modena, the Duke of which place had just revived an ancient edict forbidding every body thus situated to leave his states without permission. That



favour cost much money. A change in the plans agreed upon became necessary. After some deliberation, it was determined to send Goldoni to Modena, where there was an University as at Pavia.

Arrived at this destination, he was received by a cousin, and placed in the house of a celebrated barrister under whose guidance he was to study. But an event occurred which entirely set aside this arrangement. Strolling through the streets one day, feasting his eyes upon the beauties of the town, Goldoni witnessed a scene which deeply affected him. An abbot, an enlightened man of letters and poet, well known and much esteemed, was standing with bare head and hands tied, doing penance upon a scaffold erected in the midst of the public way. He was accused of having made scandalous proposals to a newly married wife. By his side was a priest, whip in hand. Another priest was catechising the wretched man. He replied with haughty firmness. The vast crowd, gathered round the scaffold, applauded and encouraged him. The priest took a sterner tone; the poor abbot trembled. Goldoni saw no more. His head turned dizzy; his heart sickened; his knees trembled; he rushed from the spot. For days he remained a prey to the nervous attack that sight had caused him. He became filled with morbid feelings of devotion. He imagined that nothing less than a life-time devoted to sacred pursuits would wipe out the black stains of sin already marked upon his soul. He wandered like a second Bunyan loaded with the heaviest self-accusations of guilt. His mind was completely unhinged. The advocate with whom he was living was pleased with this appearance of piety in one so young. He encouraged Goldoni's sombre mood. He sought to strengthen and fix it; spoke of nothing but saints



and miracles, martyrdoms and conversions; and of the miserable abbot who, tortured into an avowal of all the crimes with which he was charged, had been sentenced to six years' imprisonment. It wanted but this to complete the temporary delirium of Goldoni. He was now hotly inflamed with religious zeal. He wrote to his father begging permission to leave the world, and to enter the order of the Capuchins. His father treated the application with much sagacity. He offered not the slightest objection to it. He even appeared favourable to the project. But he begged his son to return home before taking any decided step. Goldoni was grateful for this considerate treatment. Doubtless he was prepared for strong opposition to his views; for tears and entreaties on the one hand, for reproaches and harsh words on the other; for a first introduction, in fact, to the seducing delights of self-sought martyrdom. What more pleasant to a morbid religious mind than a sense of persecution? It is so agreeable to bear a greater weight than our neighbours, and to have attention called to the fact! We point with pious pride to the sack upon our backs, and cry, "See how heavily we are laden!" But it is a mere air-blown bag we are carrying,—very huge and portly, no doubt,—but of feather lightness after all. When life's real burdens are laid upon us, it will be time enough to talk of our strength.

Had there been any lack of sincerity on Goldoni's part, he would have been piqued rather than pleased by the considerate conduct of his father. But he was too young in feeling to be a deceiver, and he set out with subdued contrition at his heart. Arrived at home, he was welcomed in the old affectionate manner. He spoke of his intention. It was considered laudable and

judicious. He was led to Venice. He had no wish to go at first ; but his father told him it was for the purpose of introducing him to the head of the Capuchins there ; and he was content. Once in that city, many things prevented an immediate visit to the Capuchins. There were friends to call upon—invitations to accept—dinners to eat—the theatres to see. At the end of a fortnight Goldoni had passed through such a variety of scenes, had met so many friends, and had been so diverted, that all his morbid feelings were gone. He had no further desire to be buried alive in a convent. The scaffold scene was still firmly fixed in his memory, but it had lost its effect. There might be much Meekness in avoiding that great enemy, the World ; but he felt there was more Manliness in going boldly up and confronting it.

He was right. It is a struggle we must all engage in. We try in vain to fly it. Whether we take our stand upon the broad highways of life, or are mewed up within the walls of seclusion, the battle must still be fought.

## CHAP. III.

## LAUNCHED INTO LIFE.

GOLDONI back in Chiozza, it became necessary to find him another protector. Fortunately a new Governor was sent just then from Venice. Attached to him was an officer charged with the administration of justice in regard to the criminal affairs of the town. He was in want of an assistant. Influence was exerted, and Goldoni obtained the vacant post. At the end of sixteen months he was made head assistant, and prepared to follow his chief to Feltre. While making arrangements for the journey he met with another love adventure which terminated as unpleasantly as the first. A young lady receiving her education in a convent attracted his admiration. The mistress of the establishment became aware of this circumstance, and craftily gave him encouragement. His chamber looked upon that which the young lady occupied. They established a system of correspondence by signals, and spoke the language of affection in this disjointed manner half an hour each day. Everything seemed tending to his happiness. One day, however, a signal was made to him by his lady-love,—a signal of distress,—that startled him from his pleasant dream. She was going to be married to her guardian, said Love's telegraph in the most intelligible manner. Goldoni flew indignantly to the mistress of the convent, and demanded an explanation. It was given

to him with untroubled hardihood. He was too young to marry then, said this guardian of youth. He could afford to wait. When he was ready, the young lady would no doubt be free again, and wealthy. For she was to marry a rich husband, very old and infirm. There was no probability he would live long !

Goldoni left the convent in disgust, and hastened away to Feltre in order to forget the young lady and her scheming mistress.

Feltre he found to be a town situated in the midst of a rugged mountain district, about sixty leagues from Venice. It was so thickly covered with snow during the winter season, that the street-doors were blocked up, and the windows of the first floor became the ordinary means of exit into the street. There was a company of comedians in the place, and its performances served to beguile many of Goldoni's leisure hours. When the fine weather came, there were other amusements not less agreeable. Goldoni's duties apparently were not heavy. Like those of official positions nearer home, they did not press very uneasily upon the time or the intellect of the indolently-happy who discharged them. Having upon one occasion business to attend to, which was to occupy him two hours, in a town some few miles distant, he determined to make the journey an opportunity for a little diversion. He invited friends to accompany him. Six ladies and six gentlemen formed the party when complete. Four servants attended to minister to their wants. "Everybody was on horseback," says Goldoni, "and we employed twelve days for this delightful excursion. During that time we never dined or supped in the same place, and during twelve nights we never slept upon beds. Very often we wandered on foot among pleasant paths,

bordered by vines and overshadowed by fig-trees, breakfasting upon milk, or sometimes upon the *polenta* eaten by the peasants of the country. At every place we arrived at there were fêtes, rejoicings, banquets; and, at night, balls which lasted until the dawn, without rendering the ladies of our company more fatigued than ourselves."

It was impossible, of course, that the young and excitable Goldoni could go through such a delightful journey as this without losing his heart. Two sisters were among the ladies of the party. With one of these he became enamoured. But the return journey proved too much for the excursionists. Another route was taken to give variety to enjoyment. The fêtes, balls, and banquets were recommenced; but they began to lose their attraction, to tire instead of to amuse. When the travellers reached their homes, there was not one amongst them who did not feel completely worn out. Goldoni was unwell for a fortnight; the young lady who had gained his love, fell ill of a fever which lasted for six weeks. When health was restored, however, fresh amusements were commenced. A little theatre existed in the place. Permission was obtained to use it. A company of amateurs was formed, with Goldoni for director. It was a post just to his taste. He transformed two operas of Metastasio into tragedies, by changing the airs into recitative; distributed the characters according to the talent of his actors; took subordinate parts himself; and added to the attraction of the performances by producing two little pieces from his own pen. These pieces were of sufficient merit to gain afterwards a footing upon the regular stage at Venice; but they gained it in a manner not very agreeable to the author. A young barrister

produced them as his own. He was complimented upon his works. Rendered imprudent by success, he had the audacity to publish the two pieces with his name affixed. Goldoni fortunately arrived in time to declare the imposture, and to strip his stolen laurels from the brow of the thief.

The young author could not prevail upon his Angelica—for such was the name of the lady who had captivated him—to take part in these dramatic representations. She was timid, and feared the anger of her relatives. Whether her refusal caused ill-feeling between them, or whether his affection had never been of a serious kind, we know not. The young lady evidently was willing to become his bride. It was Goldoni who this time played the deceiver. Either from weakness or inconstancy, as he himself confesses, he left Feltre and his occupation without marrying her.

Goldoni's father, wandering from town to town, like his son, without being able to fix himself anywhere, had for the time become established at Bagnacavallo. Goldoni determined to join him there. During the journey, he bought a little of that experience which is so easy to obtain, but which often costs so dear. On board the boat from Venice was a young man who affected the airs of a great person. He pretended to grow weary of the voyage, and proposed a game of cards to Goldoni in order to divert the time. Goldoni played and lost, without suspicion of his companion's character. Arrived at Ferrara, and lodged in his hotel, he was surprised by a visit from the card-player. He came, he said, to propose another game, in order that Goldoni might have his revenge. It was in vain that poor Goldoni protested he wanted no revenge; the other would not listen to him, and they sat down.



The game proceeded with varied results to both players. Goldoni, becoming warm, staked a large sum, and won. His companion grew irritated. Accusations of unfair play escaped him. He drew a pistol from his pocket, and, under cover of that weapon, seized upon the money. Goldoni called for assistance. A waiter—a confederate, doubtless, of the stranger—entered the room. He threatened to denounce both the gamblers to the authorities, for having played at a game of chance forbidden by the law. Goldoni was alarmed. Utterly indifferent to the loss of his money, he was only too happy to bribe the waiter into silence, and hurry away from the place.

Arrived shortly afterwards at Bagnacavallo, he met once again his parents. From one of them he was soon to be parted. His father had been in danger of death. He had recovered, but was speedily attacked again; and on the 9th of March, 1731, succumbed to the illness which had seized him. Goldoni felt this loss acutely, and mourned long with his mother, to whom he grew more tenderly attached. The sight of a place which had been the scene of so sad an event was unendurable to both of them. Very shortly after that event they returned to Venice. Goldoni was urged by his mother to continue his legal studies, and become a barrister. He had forgotten most of his law knowledge; but he applied himself industriously to regain it; with such success, too, that in a short time he was privileged to put on the robe and the immense wig which were the symbols of the barrister's profession.

He was a barrister, but, like many others who before and since have been of that calling, he was without briefs. His friends promised him all sorts of

assistance. He waited patiently in his office until it should arrive, but its pace was very slow. Barristers abounded then in Venice. There were a hundred and forty there. Of these, about twelve occupied the first rank, and did the best business; twenty filled the second rank, and did what business was left; the remaining one hundred and eight lived principally upon hope. Amongst this latter class was Goldoni. He found his portion exceedingly meagre. With a vast amount of leisure time upon his hands, it was natural that he should seek to occupy it with literary labours. He sharpened his pen that had never yet written word or letter upon a brief, and set to work. His ideas took a strange vehicle for their expression. He wrote an *Almanack*! an almanack for the year 1732, with a discourse upon the year,—four upon the seasons, in interlaced verses, after the manner of Dante,—criticisms upon the manners of the age,—and for each day of the year a prognostic, containing a pleasant criticism or a pun.

This singular production met with great success; and, if we may credit Goldoni, deserved it. He assures us, with much naïveté, that his pleasantries were truly comic, and that each prognostic would have furnished the subject of a comedy. The almanack finished, he next turned his attention to the drama, and sketched several comic pieces. But the gravity of the profession he had embraced, necessitated, he thought, an equal gravity in his literary productions. He deserted Thalia for Melpomene. A musical tragedy, called “*Amalasonte*,” was the first inspiration from his new muse. He thought it good; friends were not wanting to think so too; he believed his fame secure.

There were still leisure moments that were not occu-

pied with literary composition, and these led Goldoni into that stream of soft troubles wherein on three previous occasions he had been plunged. Among the acquaintance of his mother, was an unmarried lady, who, although in her fortieth year, looked so attractive, with her rosy-tinted cheeks, her snowy skin, her large bright eyes, her charming mouth, and her rounded figure, that Goldoni soon experienced a strong inclination to make her his wife. The lady of forty encouraged him in his passion. There seemed every probability that the union would take place. But the lady was coquettish; another suitor, rich and noble, appeared upon the scene. She turned her regard towards the new comer, and ceased to throw even a glance upon the less fortunate lover. He was hurt and irritated. The lady had a married sister, who occupied apartments in the same house. She was the mother of a young girl. To that young girl Goldoni at once transferred his affection. He continued to visit the elder lady, but paid his court in secret to her young relative. He hurried his passion onwards so rapidly, that, in a short time, he was accepted as her affianced husband; a preliminary contract of marriage being drawn up, and signed by the interested parties. It soon came to the ears of the capricious beauty, and her rage burst like a tempest. She had brought matters to a crisis with her new admirer, and was humiliated to find that the only condition upon which he would take her, was that of enjoying half her fortune at once, and the remaining half at her death! She had dismissed him instantly, and was almost dead of chagrin. The news of Goldoni's doings came at a moment when she had resolved to entice the neglected lover back. It completed her misery. She heaped

up reproaches and invectives upon the heads of the young couple, and gave herself in marriage, the following week, to a suitor she had previously rejected.

Goldoni saw himself on the eve of being united to a girl whom he had wooed and won rather hastily. He was not quite so happy as he ought to have been at the prospect of such a pleasing event. He had no money; and there were ceremonies connected with marriage in Venice which rendered money indispensable. One of these was the presentation to his betrothed of a ring — not the ordinary wedding-ring used at the ceremony; but one of diamonds, very costly and very brilliant. Then there were banquets to be given to friends; and if at these banquets there were not a vast amount of display and very costly viands, the bridegroom was looked upon with disdain; stood in danger of losing his social position. As a crowning expense, there was a pearl necklace to buy, which, placed upon the neck of the bride, some days before the marriage, by the mother or nearest female relative of the bridegroom, was regularly worn until the end of the first year of matrimony. It is true this last charge could be dispensed with; for, as comparatively few families had sufficient wealth to purchase a pearl necklace, the custom prevailed of hiring one. But even borrowed finery was dear; and Goldoni saw no prospect of obtaining sufficient money for his wants, arranged though they might be according to the most modest estimate.

In this extremity he recollected that the marriage contract he had signed contained three clauses, which if acted upon would draw him from all embarrassment. These were; first, that a pension belonging to his bride was to be transferred to him; second, that her diamonds were to be placed in his hands or into her hands before

the day for presenting the pearls ; and third, that a considerable sum was to be given to him by a friend of the family whose name it was not wished to mention. Goldoni therefore sent a cousin to draw attention to these clauses, and to request that one, at least, of them might be acted upon. The ambassador was not very successful in his mission. The pension of the young lady, he learnt, was a life annuity not yet granted; the unknown friend of the family had gone on a journey ; and as for the diamonds, they adorned the mother so well that she could not resolve to bestow them upon her daughter.

There seemed only one resource open, and that Goldoni was not long in resolving to adopt. He embraced his mother ; transferred to her, for the purpose of paying his debts, certain property he possessed ; and fled from Venice. He wrote a letter to the mother of the disappointed bride, stating that when she was prepared to fulfil *her* engagement, he was prepared to fulfil *his* ; and so fortunately the matter terminated : contracts broken on both sides ; hearts on neither.

## CHAP. IV.

## A FIRST TRAGEDY.

GOLDONI had left his profession; he had left the city where, if anywhere, he would have been most likely to gain a living; it now became necessary to think what step he should next take. He had the musical tragedy in his pocket: he believed it a mine of wealth. He determined to go to Milan and get a dramatic company to work that mine. On the way, however, the imaginary shares in this undertaking somewhat fell in value. A friend, to whom he read his tragedy, criticised it very coldly, and advised him in future to write nothing but comic pieces. If there is one trial more galling than another, amid the thousands which a young author has to endure, it is the criticism of over-sagacious friends, who discover he has mistaken the direction of his powers. He essays tragedy; people find in it a promise of farce. He would imitate Raphael; he is advised to study Sneyders. Such disheartening comment as this rarely proves of service. It perplexes far more than it enlightens. Better let Effort take the road it thinks fit; it will arrive at its true destination in the end, though perhaps it may be a little longer on the journey. But of what consequence a short delay? The race for greatness is not a dead heat. Mind is not called upon to go a mile a minute.



Goldoni took, of course, his friend's advice with bad grace, and hastened on his journey. Other friends he met with treated his work with more favour. They greeted it with applause, but recommended the suppression of the airs and the rhyme. They were of a serious turn evidently; not at all inclined to join in the suggestion of the first critic. But what cared Goldoni for the one party or the other? He prized his tragedy too highly to part with a single one of its ornaments. He expressed himself grateful for the path indicated to him, but did not take it. He felt too secure in his own road at present.

Milan, eagerly looked for, was reached at last, and Goldoni immediately took steps to get his tragedy a hearing at the theatre. Fortunately he was acquainted with Signor and Signora Grossatesta who were the principal dancers there, and Signor Caffariello who was the principal actor. It was speedily arranged that at the house of the former he should, on an early day, be introduced to one of the directors of the theatre, to whom he might read his piece. The day came; Goldoni presented himself at the house. The scene which followed was amusing. How many budding dramatists have been blighted under similar circumstances!

Goldoni had no sooner taken his place than the leading actor arrived. Saluting the young author, as Alexander in a moment of good nature might have saluted one of his slaves, he passed on and took a seat by the side of the mistress of the house. Count Prata, the manager of the theatre, was the next arrival. He was more courteous, spoke very graciously to Goldoni, and expressed a wish to hear his piece. A little table was drawn near; the manuscript was produced; the author made vocal and other preparations for reading.

"The title of my piece," said he, no doubt with trembling voice and flushing cheek, "is 'Amalasonte.'" The leading actor at once took up the word, giving it audible utterance, framed in a tune to which he had fitted it. When A-mal-a-son-te had been duly stretched out across his musical cadences, he expressed an opinion that it was a very long name; nay more, that it was ridiculous. And he recommenced singing it. Everybody of course laughed, the unfortunate author excepted; the lady of the house interposed; silence was restored; Goldoni read the names of his dramatic personages. An old chorus singer, with a thin and squeaky voice, interrupted him.

"Too many! too many!" said this subtle critic. "There are at least two characters too many."

Goldoni this time was seriously annoyed; he wished to leave off reading; but the manager soothed him, and hushed the insolent old tenor.

"It is true," said the considerate Count, "that ordinarily there are only six or seven characters in a piece; but when the work merits it, we willingly go to the expense of two extra performers. Have the goodness to continue," he added, in conclusion.

Goldoni continued accordingly, "Act the first, Scene the first. Clodesile and Harpagon."

The leading actor could not, of course, allow this announcement to pass without a fresh interruption: "Who is your principal character?" said he.

"It is Clodesile," said Goldoni.

"What!" exclaimed the outraged actor; "you open your first scene with the principal character, and you make him appear while everybody in the theatre is taking a seat and making a noise! Per Dio! I am not your man."

Again the conciliating manager interposed :

"Let us see," said he, "if the scene be interesting."

Poor Goldoni recommenced. While he was profiting by silence to give all the effect possible to the scene, one of the company, tired of listening, went to the harpsichord, drew a roll of music from his pocket, and commenced practising ! It was evidently of no use to continue the reading to such an audience. The manager took the unhappy author by the hand, and led him into a dressing-room. Once in this room, he was able to read his piece without further interruption. He went right through it, from the first word to the last, and was listened to with patient attention by the other. When he had finished, he prepared himself for a criticism upon his work. It was given to him without reserve.

"It appears to me," said the manager, "that you have not ill studied Horace and Aristotle. But there are other rules that you must follow to the letter. You must commence by pleasing the actors and actresses. You must satisfy the composer of the music. You must consult the scene painter. There are rules for all these people, and it would be dramatic high treason to break them. In the first place, the three principal characters of the piece ought to sing five airs each ; two in the first act, two in the second, and one in the third. The second characters can only have three airs ; and the subordinate performers must content themselves with one, or two at the utmost. You must take care that two pathetic airs do not succeed each other. The other airs must be divided with the same precaution."

Count Prata was about to continue, but Goldoni had heard enough. He thanked the gentleman for his kindness, and hastily left the house. He went straight to his lodgings, without looking to the right or to the left.

He felt hot and cold in the same breath. He was humiliated; he was pained; he was disgusted with himself and the whole world. Upon arriving at his rooms his mind was still in commotion. He ordered a good fire. This order was complied with; a blazing hearth was before him. He took up his tragedy with a mournful look, read a few lines; they touched him by their merit; but he mastered himself by a great effort, and threw the whole into the flames. When the last morsel was consumed a weight seemed removed from his breast. He even felt pleased and tranquil. He ate, he drank, and finally he went to bed and enjoyed a sound and refreshing sleep.

If all young dramatists treated their first tragedy thus, what a constant blaze the world would be in!

## CHAP. V.

## WAR TIMES.

ON the morrow, determined to chase away all recollection of his annoyance, Goldoni went at an early hour to the Venetian minister, who had invited him to dinner. He sought a private interview with the official, and related what had occurred on the previous day. The minister laughed heartily, for the fate of the tragedy amused him. Nay more, he was so pleased with the frank, good-humoured way in which the young dramatist told his story, that he took him into his service as gentleman of the chamber, and gave him a very nice apartment to live in. The failure of the unhappy "Amalasonte" proved thus of more service to its author than could have been its success.

He had remained in his new employ some time, when an incident occurred which served to lead his tastes back towards that art he thought he had renounced for ever. A wandering doctor, named Bonafede Vitali, but who called himself the Unknown, arrived in Milan. He was in some respects a remarkable man. He was of good family, had received an excellent education, and had been a Jesuit. Disgusted with the cloister, he applied himself to medicine, and became professor in the University of Palermo. He was fond, however, of oratory. His post did not afford him sufficient opportunity of indulging that taste. He quitted Palermo,

therefore, and took the strange resolution of becoming a strolling doctor; haranguing the public from a platform, like another Mengin, and selling nostrums in order to live. At Milan he attracted much notice. Not only did he vaunt the praises of his medicines, but he made his platform the centre of a species of debating arena, answering all questions proposed to him, whether upon philosophy, history, criticism, or science. To please those whom such discourses might not edify, he kept up at his own expense a company of comedians; and when the business of the day was over, they gave dramatic performances upon the platform by the light of wax tapers.

Goldoni felt a great desire to introduce himself to this man, and, under pretence of purchasing some medicine, went to his house. They soon came to a good understanding. They were in positions in which they could render each other service. The theatre of Milan had closed as of ordinary during Lent, intending to reopen at Easter. In the interval an engagement came from Germany, and the company left in a body to fulfil it. Easter was approaching, and the Milan comedy would be without performers. Under these circumstances the Unknown had a great desire that his own company should occupy the vacant stage. But considerable interest was required in order to obtain permission. Goldoni was able to gain over that interest, and he did so. The company of the strolling doctor was installed in the theatre.

It was not likely that Goldoni could do thus much in the service of the drama without wishing to do more. His partiality for dramatic writing came back to him, and he wrote a little interlude, called the "Venetian Gondolier," which, he tells us, had all the success such a piece merited.



The Italian comedians of that day had a method of attracting an audience remarkable for its impudence and dishonesty. They announced with great flourish of trumpets a new piece, apparently of the most interesting kind, and when the evening for its performance came, disappointed everybody by giving a miserable production, ill-written, ill-arranged, despicable in every way. *Una arrostita* was the name they gave in their green-room parlance to this disreputable proceeding. The company of the Unknown adopted it like the rest. They advertised the first representation of a tragedy called "Belisarius." Everybody was on the tip-toe of expectation. Goldoni was specially anxious. He dispersed tickets among his friends, and did all he could to aid the success of the piece. The night came. The crowd was so great that several persons were trampled upon in the corridors. "Belisarius" was played to an immense audience. It proved to be a mere patchwork of absurdity and pretence. Everybody was disgusted, and Goldoni more so than any other. He spoke to the leading performer of the deception that had been practised, and advised him to burn "Belisarius" immediately. The comedian approved the counsel of Goldoni, but, bad as the piece was, could not afford to give it up unless he had another as a substitute. He was going, he said, to Venice the following year. If he could take a really good "Belisarius" there, he was sure of success. Would Goldoni write one? Goldoni promised that he would; and, although much occupied with his duties, he found leisure to keep his word.

Just then, indeed, came for Goldoni rather a stirring life. It was the commencement of 1733. His patron had gone to Venice, led by rumours of war then circulating. Goldoni became in some sort his secretary, and

communicated to him every day what was passing. He soon had something of great importance to relate. One morning a servant entered his bed-room and announced that Savoyard troops, horse and foot, had seized upon the city during the night and were occupying the cathedral square. Fifteen thousand of these soldiers according to Goldoni, eighteen thousand according to other accounts, had arrived. Forty thousand French were their companions in arms. It was the commencement of the war of the Polish succession, or, as it was then called in Italy, the war of Don Carlos. The King of Poland, Frederick Augustus of Saxony, had died on the 1st of February, 1733. Two claimants appeared for the throne: one, the Elector of Saxony, Frederick Augustus, son of the late monarch, supported by Russia and Austria; the other, Stanislaus Leczinsky, who had already once enjoyed the throne he coveted, but who had been driven out by Russia. The marriage of his daughter to Louis XV. had allied him with France, and that country accordingly supported his pretensions. Spain, eager for an opportunity of revenging herself upon Austria, joined with France against that power. Sardinia was enlisted into the same cause. A treaty between the three had been signed at Turin. Milan was the first place to which their arms had been directed. It had surrendered without a blow. Except the citadel, the allies were in possession of every point.

As soon as news of this intelligence reached him, Goldoni's patron returned to Milan. In a short time he received orders to depart to Crema, a town about nine miles distant from that city. He had a regular secretary, but did not like him. He was dismissed, therefore, and Goldoni was promoted to the post. Goldoni for some time was busily occupied with his new

duties. Every day he had to attend to a large correspondence, to read despatches, to compare them, to extract from them, and to send off to Venice the result of his labours sometimes four or five times in the twenty-four hours. He gave such satisfaction that he was entrusted with a more responsible charge. During an armistice declared between the combatants, he was sent to report upon the state of both camps. He acquitted himself equally well in this employ, and returned to take up "Belisarius" in the leisure hours which the changing scenes of the war brought him.

While thus engaged he was surprised by a visit from his brother, that same brother whose wicked habits he had in early life been called upon to check. The boy had become a young man now, but he had not improved. He was in want of employ, and Goldoni recommended him to his patron. But they did not agree. Both were exceedingly hot-headed; and although the servant may sometimes endure this in the master, it is rare indeed that the master can endure it in the servant. The young man soon went his way; but unfortunately his behaviour left an effect upon the mind of the minister anything but favourable to the new secretary. Goldoni was put in the shade; some one else was taken into confidence. A rupture seemed inevitable, and was not long in declaring itself. An important document was given to Goldoni to copy. He commenced the work at once; and although invited out to dinner that evening, would not go until he had finished it. When he reached the dinner party it was late in the evening. He was obliged to make up for his tardy arrival by a tardy departure. Seven o'clock of the next morning dawned before he left his friends. The party had sat up card-playing all night.

The minister in the meantime had risen before his usual hour, and had sent to Goldoni's lodging for the document and copy. To his surprise he learned that Goldoni had not been home all night. He was furious; he despatched messengers in every direction, and at last the truant was discovered.

The minister received him with a very ill grace, and threw out a suspicion that he had betrayed the secrets of the document committed to his hands. This was too much. Goldoni replied with warmth, indignant at the charge. He was threatened with arrest. That threat decided him as to the course he should pursue. He sent in his resignation the same morning. In three days he had settled all his affairs, packed up his effects, and was on his road to Modena, to join his mother who was stopping there, and to begin the world anew.

On his way he found himself in the midst of an exciting scene, such as only the drama of war could have exhibited. Arrived on the 28th of June, 1733, at Parma, he put up at an hotel, and rested there the night. Parma next day was strangely agitated. From an early hour the town was in confusion. People were hurrying to and fro, with such of their property as was portable in their arms; women were bearing off their screaming and terrified children; old men, scarcely able to support themselves, were being trampled upon by the young and lusty; invalids, roused suddenly from the bed of sickness, had borrowed strength from fear, and were striving onwards with the rest; vehicles were being overturned in the general confusion; horses were escaping; a panic had seized upon the whole population. "The Germans are at the gates!" was the universal terror-cry.

Suddenly the scene changed. Shouts of joy succeeded to cries of sorrow. The bells rang out a merry peal. There was rejoicing and thanksgiving everywhere. Fear-stricken fugitives, who had sought refuge in the churches, now came forth again into the public way. Friends embraced, who had believed themselves separated for ever, but a short time before. Mothers kissed their children, and sobbed away the tears which had found no vent in the hour of peril. All danger was at an end. The Austrians had been encountered by the French, and were forced to retreat.

Close under the walls of the city, indeed, the battle of Parma had been fought that day. The command of the French and Piedmontese forces, had devolved upon Marshal Coigny, in the absence of the King of Sardinia, Charles Emmanuel, summoned to Turin by the illness of his wife. The king had given orders that no offensive operations were to be attempted; but according to Goldoni's account, they were forced upon the allied troops by the treachery of a spy in the pay of both camps. For nine hours the conflict raged. Goldoni was one of the many spectators who crowded to the ramparts to see it. The Austrian commander, Marshal Mercy, and the Prince of Wurtemberg, were killed. Their bodies were embalmed, and sent to Germany. Twenty-five thousand men, in all, lay dead upon the field. On the following day Goldoni went out, and visited the scene of battle. It was a horrible sight. The dead had been stripped during the night, and now lay piled up, corpse upon corpse, naked and bloody, mutilated and disfigured, a ghastly and sickening heap. The inhabitants of Parma feared a

pestilence; but lime was sent in abundance from Venice, and the bodies blended harmlessly with the earth.

It was a horrible sight. Goldoni was glad to fly from it. So also are we.



## CHAP. VI.

## ITALIAN COMEDY.

A TROUBLED time is war time, as Goldoni had already experienced. Not the least of its annoyances is its interference with the ordinary passages of communication from city to city. Modena, as we know, was the point Goldoni wished to reach; but the road to Modena, owing to the frequent incursions of the two armies, was impracticable. He determined, therefore, to proceed to Brescia, with two travellers who were taking that route. On the way, he had another illustration of the disorders induced by war: he was robbed and stripped of all he possessed,—of all, except his “Belisarius.” He seems to have been so pleased at preserving this, that he forgot the annoyance of his losses. He does not tell us where he was robbed, or by whom; does not give a single detail of the circumstance. The thought of his tragedy absorbed, apparently, every other; and his reminiscences in after years only went back to that work.

Assisted by friends, whom he always appears to have met ready made for him upon the road, he arrived at last at Verona. The vast Roman amphitheatre there he found to be occupied by a troop of comedians, who gave performances in it, during the day-time, in the old Roman manner. The amphitheatre, which held twenty thousand persons, had been fitted up with skill.

The charge for admission was trifling. It was one of the best paying theatres in Italy. Goldoni went straight to witness the performance. What was his delight to recognise, in the first person who appeared upon the scene, Casali, the actor for whom he had written "Belisarius!" They met with open arms; and Goldoni, introduced to the director of the troop, Signor Imer, was as courteously received as a young dramatic author always should be. Casali was anxious to see the new piece; and the day succeeding that of his arrival, Goldoni read it. The whole of the dramatic company were present. Instead of singing, whistling, carping, or acting in any way as the ill-behaved crew had acted at Milan, they listened with proper attention to "Belisarius," and, when finished, applauded it with unanimous voice. Casali himself was in ecstasies, and hurried away with the manuscript, in order that the work of copying might on that instant commence. The manager, Signor Imer, was not less gratified. He invited Goldoni to use his table all the time he stayed at Verona, gave him a very comfortable lodging, and begged him to write another piece. The young author at once took up his pen. The company does not seem to have been very effective. The two principal lady singers knew not a note of music, but had taste and good voices; Imer was in the same case. The satisfied public asked no more. For these two ladies and the manager, as leading characters, Goldoni composed a piece in three acts. Much approved when read, it was sent to Venice to be set to music.

At the conclusion of the dramatic season at Verona, Goldoni accompanied Imer to Venice. He had some apprehension, at first, lest he might be called upon to fulfil that matrimonial engagement which had caused

his precipitous flight from the city months before. But he was soon put at ease upon this point. The mother of the young lady, hearing that he had become connected with players, looked upon him as hopelessly sunk beneath the level of her gentility, and disdained all allusion to the broken match. Goldoni was only too glad thus to lower his head, in order to escape the noose hanging over it.

He was soon introduced to the proprietor of the Venetian theatre, of which Imer was manager; found him an exceedingly pleasant gentleman; and an arrangement was made by which Goldoni became dramatic author to the establishment. While he worked upon new pieces, "Belisarius" was produced. It was received with great favour. Goldoni says, that, compared with the farces of the day, it was considered by good critics as a very fair beginning for a young author,—a step towards the reform of the Italian stage. But to compare tragedy with farce is not, perhaps, to submit it to a very exacting test. Goldoni admits, however, that it had one fault. *Belisarius* appeared upon the scene with his eyes torn and bleeding! The author did not, therefore, claim the full honours of tragedy for his piece, but allowed comedy to divide them. "*Belisarius*" he modestly calls a *tragi-comedy*.

The other productions which he wrote during the same season, including an opera,—a new form of composition to him,—were all applauded, and Goldoni was an established dramatic author. At the close of the theatre, the company went to other places, followed by their play-writer, who prepared, during the journey, fresh novelties for the next season at Venice. Returned there, he met his mother, whom he had not seen for

several years, and passed many delightful hours in her society. She wished him to enter again upon his old profession of barrister; but he had been too successful in his new profession, and found himself so well fitted for it, that he could not yield to her request. The novelties he had written were soon afterwards produced, and the mother had opportunities of seeing whether her son had deceived himself in remaining faithful to the stage. One of these novelties was a comic opera, the first probably which had ever appeared in the Venetian states.

Goldoni had become useful to the company to such an extent, that when, in the following spring, it went to Genoa, he was asked to accompany it. He complied, and seems to have been delighted with that magnificent city. He gazed with rapture upon its splendid port, its street of palaces, its numberless terraces, mansions, and gardens. He speculated in the lottery which was managed in secret then, and gained an ambo with great satisfaction. He speculated, too, in a more important lottery,—that of marriage; and came off equally with a prize,—a charming young girl, daughter of one of the notaries of the bank of St. George. She made a fond, loving wife, and consoled him for the disappointments his affections had hitherto suffered.

More and more successful every season, Goldoni began to plant a firmer foot upon the stage. He determined to carry out certain reforms which he had long meditated, but which he had not yet felt sufficiently influential to undertake. To comprehend more fully the extent and value of those reforms, let us quit Goldoni for a while, and briefly glance at the state of Italian comedy at the time when he commenced writing. It is the only means, perhaps, by which we can rightly esti-

mate the influence he exercised, and judge of the claim he has to take rank among Italian dramatic writers.

Since the sixteenth century comedy may be said to have died out in Italy. It had flourished during that century with considerable vigour. A host of writers had arisen, not, it is true, of commanding talent, but of sufficient to keep the comic stage at a fair intellectual level. The fertility of these writers was profuse, the age considered. More than a thousand comedies are said to have been written at this period. If there was no great genius exhibited, there was plenty of facile invention. During the whole of the following century there was even more abundant invention, but it was of much lower order. Manners had grown more corrupt, public life more stagnant, virtue less and less recognisable; the comic dramatist, as in the days of our own Glorious Restoration, and of King Charles of virtuous memory (son of the Blessed Martyr), aided the general prostration of mind and morals, instead of striving to raise them from their degradation. The literary merit of these writers was so far inferior to that of the writers who had preceded them, that it scarcely obtains recognition. Comedy had, in fact, become extinct.

The pieces played in its name—and there was no lack of them — were mere frameworks filled up at will by the actor. The author wrote out the plan of his piece, the order of the incidents, the disposition of the characters; the actor did the rest. This system, so utterly prejudicial to the true development of the dramatic art, had been growing in popularity from a very early period. The strolling quack, who with his Merry Andrew traversed the country from town to town, is supposed, and no doubt with reason, to have been its originator. From a mere dialogue between two persons, the Knave

and the Fool, the transition would be easy to a little farce sustained by three or four characters. In time, as these farces grew in importance, they were deemed worthy of publication. Flaminio Scala, it has been said, was one of the earliest authors of these pieces whose productions had that honour. But Scala's farces date no further back than 1611, while those of Beolco Ruzante were published as early as 1530. Increasing in popularity year by year, these *scenarii*, or *commedie dell' arte* as they were called, had during the seventeenth century almost complete possession of the comic stage in Italy. Nay more, they penetrated into France, and assisted in establishing genuine comedy there. Molière's first essays in dramatic composition were, we know, adaptations of these pieces. His farce "Le Médecin Volant" is only a free translation of an Italian piece, "Il Medico Volante," afterwards versified by Boursault. "La Jalousie du Barbouillé," and some other farces of Molière which have not reached us, were from similar sources.

At the commencement of the eighteenth century the improvised pieces were still supreme in Italy. If a few comedies, fully written and developed, were from time to time produced, they had no chance against their less restricted rivals. They seemed stiff and pedantic by the side of pieces which allowed to the actor the fullest liberty of speech and action. They might please the educated few, although their merit was not always sufficient to produce that result; but the public at large cared nothing for them. They could only find amusement in the improvised pieces, and these sank to a lower level, intellectually and morally, day by day.

One remarkable feature in these productions which tended to keep them at a low literary ebb, was the little field they afforded for invention on the part of the



author. Four characters appeared in every piece, under different circumstances it is true, but invariably with the same attributes. They were the very pillars on which Italian comedy was supported. Representative types of character, they were endowed with names, dress, and manners, which never changed. The first of these persons was the Pantalone. He was an honest old man, a trader of Venice. He wore a black robe and woollen cap, a red waistcoat, breeches cut off short like drawers, red stockings and slippers, and a beard ridiculously long. It was the costume of the early Venetian traders, and is that still worn by one of our old friends of Christmas Pantomime. The next was a member of the learned professions; he was the Doctor. Supposed to be of Bologna, he wore the dress of its university. He also was old. The remaining characters were two valets, Brighella and Arlecchino, who sometimes had other names. Their dress was poor, patched with unnumbered pieces of different stuffs and colours. A hare's tail ornamented their hats. Brighella was all cunning and address. Arlecchino was somewhat of a blockhead. Such were the four personages of the Italian comedy. But in addition to this unchanging feature of the scene, the female characters were almost always cast in the same mould and bore the same names. Even throughout Goldoni, nearly all the young lady heroines are either Beatrice or Rosaura; the one lively, pert, and rattling, the other tender and submissive. The servant is invariably Colombina.

We can imagine the intellectual height of Italian comedy with such a system in operation. All real mental labour was taken from the author. Creation of character was a thing he never dreamt of. He had not even to invent names. His four persons were there,

like four puppets ; he had only to pull a few strings and put them in motion. The merest hack writer of the French or English stage would be almost a Shakspeare by his side.

Yet it cannot be denied that the system had its advantages. What trouble and expense were saved to the manager ! Instead of having week after week to devise new and attractive costumes, and spend large sums in making them,—for even stage gold is not all brass,—he simply had to provide each of his four characters with one dress per season. Beautiful and simple arrangement ! Nobody expected to see Pantalone in any other than his ordinary guise ; or Arlecchino decked in aught save his tatters and his tail. What repose for the managerial purse !

Indeed, looked at from this point of view, it becomes a question whether a similar system might not, with propriety, be introduced upon the English stage. We should simply have to give individuality to the generic personages of our scene. The low comedy man, the young butterfly lover, the first old man, the walking gentleman, the saucy maid, would all appear as embodied types, each with an unchanging name, dress, and idiosyncrasy.

It is true that this would be to confine within even narrower limits a system already pretty tightly bound. Though we do not endow our theatrical characters with an undeviating costume, their mental dress varies but little. How often do we not meet with venerable old friends who have stood in front of our foot-lights any time these thirty years ! They may affect a few new manners, and deck themselves in a few new robes ; but we know them through all their disguises. That same irascible old father who wishes his daughter to marry

some wizened and jaundiced suitor, and who flies into frightful excesses of anger when he discovers that she is in love with the darling cousin, handsome, but wretchedly poor; that flippant servant who abuses her master, and, like another Martine, leaves domestic duties to argue upon matrimonial matters, and give her unsolicited advice to parents and guardians; that wicked lord, dreadful specimen of the English aristocrat, who seems to have taken out a special patent of villany, who has usurped his brother's titles and estates long before the rising of the curtain, and who successfully carries on a series of diabolical schemes, until miserably baffled, in the last scene, by the reappearance of the only half-murdered rightful heir; that milk and honey hero, who has the wisdom of the ancient Song-writer, the acquirements of a Crichton, the beauty of a male Venus, and who never speaks except in language that is worthy of framing and glazing; that comic rustic, sailor, gardener, or otherwise, who to the courage of the lion adds the cunning of the fox, the tenderness of the spaniel, the generosity of the Newfoundland, and the good humour of the jackass; are not all these — patched and painted as they may be — as familiar to us as the dear thing we call wife, and the little merry ones who call us father, and play fine games of romping upon our knees? Assuredly, or the English stage is utterly an unknown land to us. It might, perhaps, then be unadvisable to attempt further uniformity where already so much exists.

But we are losing sight of Goldoni.

It was no light reform he attempted when he strove to abolish the improvised pieces, and to make the performer say nothing more than was written down for him. He struck at a system in which the actor had

been educated all his life, and which procured him half his fame. To make him but a mere repeater of another's words was to reduce him, he thought, almost to the level of a puppet. If he did not utter his own witticisms and speak his own language, he was lost. Unfortunately there were not wanting authors and critics to encourage him in this idea. Not to attempt too much at once, Goldoni drew out a comedy, the "*Momolo Cortesan*," but wrote only the principal character; the rest he left to the actors. He gave them special instructions, however, as to their respective parts, and had the satisfaction of finding that the piece was well received.

There was another blot upon the Italian stage, which Goldoni also wished to remove,—the four characters were always masked. These masks destroyed all real delineation of character—destroyed all power of expression on the part of the actor. No matter what the sentiment he wished to express; no matter whether he sought to depict joy or sorrow, content or disappointment, love or hatred; his false face always remained the same. He might change his voice to express different emotions; but, without a corresponding change of feature, it only added to the absurdity of the performance, by introducing an incongruity between the words spoken and the aspect of the speaker. There was not, as Goldoni argued, the same motive for retaining these disguises as had existed among the Greeks and Romans. In their performances the mask served, we know, as a species of speaking-trumpet, and was rendered to some extent necessary by the vastness of the arena in which the plays were acted. This was not the case upon the Italian stage; and there seemed no reason for adhering to a custom so ridiculous, except the long usage which had preserved it. But this was a reason that clung with

much tenacity to men's minds. Woe unto the reformer, however trifling may be the reform he seeks to introduce ! If he will meddle with the foundation of the house, he must be quite prepared for the walls to fall about his ears. Be sure that no one will be by to give him a helping hand out of the ruins.

It took Goldoni many years to succeed, even partially, in introducing the changes he desired to see accomplished. He was attacked on all sides. He was accused of trying to banish imagination and poetry from the Italian stage ! Gozzi, who was one of his strongest opponents, continually goaded him with epigrams, which, unfortunately, were only too sharp and well pointed. To turn actors into marionnettes, make them speak according to rule, and act in harmony thereto ! It was monstrous ! Fortunately for Goldoni his system found many warm supporters, and the public encouraged it. Grumble as critics or actors might, his pieces were successful. Indeed the audience must have been pretty well tired of the wretched scenarii, and anxious for something better. Goldoni's path towards reform was strewn, therefore, to some extent, with roses, though here and there was many an ugly thorn !

## CHAP. VII.

## NEW PURSUITS.

IN the midst of his dramatic labours, Goldoni received a strange appointment. The Genoese consul at Venice died. The relatives of Goldoni's wife had influence; they exerted it in favour of Goldoni. Before he was well aware of it, he found himself installed in the vacant post. He was not altogether unused to the writing of despatches, or to the management of official business. He applied himself to his new duties with energy, and appears to have discharged them in a satisfactory manner. But they interfered somewhat with his time; moreover, they led him into expenses which formerly had not been necessary. He had accepted the office without asking the salary attached to it. When he wrote for information upon this point, he was told that his predecessor had served without remuneration, and that the state was not in a position to make any different arrangement. There was only, then, the profits of the consulate to recompense him for his labour and expense, and those profits did not amount to more than a hundred crowns a year! Goldoni was in dismay. He thought of resigning at once, but resolved to delay this step a little longer. Several events occurred at this time to increase the unpleasantness of his position. He was entrusted with two gold boxes, ornamented with diamonds, to



dispose of. He placed them in the hands of a gentleman, likely, he thought, to become a purchaser. The gentleman pawned the boxes, sent Goldoni the certificates, which proved his villany, and absconded. Goldoni was obliged to borrow money of his father-in-law in order to redeem the jewels. Several traders, annoyed by a piece called the "Bankrupt," which he had lately produced, did not fail to take advantage of this circumstance. They added to the vexation he experienced, by accusing him of the act of which he had been the victim. Fortunately for Goldoni, he had evidence which completely proved the falsity of these charges.

A short time afterwards, some money passed through his hands. A portion of it was to be sent to Genoa; the rest was to be given to the proprietor of a theatre at Venice. Goldoni fulfilled these instructions to the letter. But his detractors made the transaction appear in another light. They charged him with detaining the second portion of the money. He had proofs which refuted the accusation, and he at once brought them forward. But the calumny had, no doubt, poisoned the ears of the public; for, years afterwards, Goldoni deemed it necessary to allude to the circumstance, lest, as he said, the subject might be revived when he was no longer able to justify himself.

Almost at the same time another annoyance happened to him. In 1740 a new war had broken out,—that of the Austrian Succession, or the war of Don Philip, as it was generally called in Italy. France and Spain had leagued together to deprive Maria Theresa of the Austrian succession. The Duke of Modena had united with the Bourbons. To carry on the expenses of the war,

he had stopped payment of the dividends of the Ducal Bank. Goldoni's property was invested in that bank. This was a blow he could not stand against, for the expenses of his consulate now threatened to submerge him. He determined to go to Modena to demand his money, and wrote to Genoa for permission to put a substitute in his place while he went upon this errand. While he was waiting for the reply of the senate, his brother came once again to trouble him. He had not improved; indeed, he seems to have become a little more obnoxious than before. He had grown so presumptuous and conceited, that Goldoni found it difficult indeed to bear with him. The poor consul had want of attention and sympathy too just now, not of a fresh source of vexation. He was glad enough, therefore, when letters arrived from Genoa authorising him to leave a substitute in his place while he went to Modena. He made arrangements for setting out at once, and, after two delays, had his foot on the threshold of departure. But his brother, his tormenting brother, drew him back. He came to Goldoni, one morning, in the utmost excitement, his face flushed, his eyes glistening, his whole frame throbbing with delight. He was going to make his fortune, and that of his brother. He had formed, that morning, the acquaintance of a military captain; a man of immense importance; a man entrusted with all kinds of delicate missions by all the Courts of Europe; a man worth knowing. This distinguished officer was beating up recruits for a new regiment of two thousand Illyrians. Goldoni could be grand judge of the regiment; Goldoni junior, a superior officer. But not a word must be said of the matter. If the government of Venice heard of it, all would be lost.

Nothing is so contagious as real enthusiasm, however childish and unreasonable it may be. Goldoni was fairly led away by the representations of his brother. When the captain appeared, he proved so bland, smiling, courteous, well-bred, and amusing, that the conquest was complete. The consul-dramatist entered into the scheme with ardour. He lodged the captain in his house; he arranged with the contractors who were to supply the uniforms for the regiment; he gave audiences to the officers engaged. The captain was of course charmed with all this attention. He begged Goldoni to accept a distinguished post in connection with the new regiment. The sun of success seemed, for a time, to smile warm and genial upon everything.

But alas! envious clouds will come to tarnish even the brightest day. One morning, the captain called upon Goldoni, sad and gloomy. A great weight evidently was upon his mind. He had to pay six thousand francs before the end of that day; the nature of the debt was such, that if not settled, all would be discovered to the government. He could obtain no delay. Ruin stared him in the face. The simple-hearted Goldoni was affected, and all the generosity of his nature was aroused. He determined to make any sacrifice in order to obtain the money. He went out, borrowed it of a friend, returning with eager joy to place the sum in the hands of the captain. The gratitude of that noble officer was too great for words. He took the money, and went away to settle with the stony-hearted creditors. On the morrow, the captain could not be found at his post. He had deserted on the preceding night, and was never seen in Venice again.

The annoyance of poor Goldoni was great, but complain he dare not. He had played an underhand

part, and feared that if his conduct became known, he should incur the displeasure of authority on the one side, and the laughter of the public on the other. Silence was his only remedy. In order to divert his mind from the subject, he undertook, at last, his journey, and started with his wife for Bologna. There, being asked by the manager of the theatre to write something for the company, he worked up the incident in which he had just figured, into a comedy, and called it the "Impostor." All the force of his spirit, he says, was thrown into this composition. He made it, in fact, a receptacle for the strong indignation the deceiver had aroused within him. He spared neither his brother nor himself in the play, and when the whole was complete, felt all his annoyance subside. He was revenged, and revenge in no other shape would probably have afforded him the same satisfaction.

The "Impostor" fairly finished, Goldoni prepared to set out for Modena, to claim his dividends at the hand of the duke. But he had delayed his journey so long that now it was too late. The duke was no longer at Modena. He had gone to the Spanish camp at Rimini, intending to stop there during the winter. Goldoni knew not what course to adopt. Fortunately a comedian, of the theatre he had just written for, came to his aid. He was going, he said, to Rimini, and advised Goldoni to go with him. A dramatic company was there; it would doubtless be glad to employ a writer so well known. The advice seemed good, and Goldoni acted upon it.

Arrived at the Spanish camp, he was presented to the duke. The nobleman was very affable, spoke familiarly of the stage and of Goldoni's pieces; but when the subject of the dividends was approached beat a hasty retreat. Goldoni saw that for the time there was no

hope of obtaining redress, and so without wasting a moment in lamentation, commenced writing for the theatre.

Weeks passed in this employment. The war was not yet over. The Austrians, gathering strength, were marching towards Rimini. The Spanish, learning their intention, precipitously left the place. The forsaken dramatist was now in an awkward position. He was a subject of the Duke of Modena. He was Genoese consul at Venice. Both Venice and Modena were on the side of France and Spain. When the Austrians arrived, it seemed by no means improbable that he might be regarded as an enemy. His only security appeared to be in flight. Some foreign dealers were going to Pesaro; he resolved to accompany them. They took ship at once, but when only half way upon their voyage were obliged to seek shelter from the violence of the waves in the roads of Cattolica. There they landed, and leaving their luggage under the care of servants, finished the remainder of the journey in a country cart. Arrived at Pesaro, worn out with fatigue and recent seasickness, they found the place filled to overflowing with the troops and the suite of the Duke of Modena. Every house was doubly besieged with lodgers. The only refuge Goldoni and his wife could obtain was a granary loft. That, however, was but the commencement of their troubles. On the morrow Goldoni went out to inquire for his luggage; of which he was much in need. He met one of his fellow passengers, who gave him information upon this point which did not tend to revive his spirits. Cattolica had been seized by the Austrians; the luggage was in their hands. Goldoni was overpowered. All the personal effects of himself and his wife were contained in the boxes he had left behind.

He resolved, after some deliberation, to adopt a bold course. He would go and ask the Austrians to restore his property ! He was a non-combatant ; he was not attached to Spain ; there was no reason why he should be treated as an enemy, or that his request should be refused. Certainly Goldoni was not a man who had much mistrust of his species. What flexibility there was in his simple and trusting disposition ! A stern mind would have borne this loss in haughty silence. The milder man puts on a smiling face, and endeavours to get back his own. By what different remedies our wounds are healed !

It was not without much difficulty that Goldoni obtained a chaise to convey himself and his wife to Cattolica. For a long time nobody could be found to lend either horse or vehicle for such a doubtful enterprise. A military order was at last necessary in order to obtain this accommodation. The chaise was then provided with a show of willingness which, in reality, was only the covering of great disinclination. The driver had quite made up his mind not to undergo the risk of carrying Goldoni and his wife into the midst of a hostile camp. When about half way upon the journey, he seized the opportunity afforded by a momentary descent they had made from the vehicle, turned his horses' heads, and drove back again full speed to Pesaro. They were then six miles from Cattolica.

It was no trifling distance for a woman to walk who had just been enfeebled by a rough sea voyage. But Goldoni's wife did not shrink from the fatigue, and they commenced their journey with firm feet and stout hearts. It was by no means so easy or agreeable as a pleasure promenade, for traces of the havoc of war were continually met with, and many of the accommodations enjoyed



by travellers in more peaceful times were destroyed. In one place the bridge over a stream had been broken, and it was necessary to wade through the water. But Goldoni took his wife over upon his shoulders, as gallantly as a lover would have borne his mistress. *Omnia bona mea mecum porto*, said he, with the grace of a Romeo, and deposited those riches in safety upon the opposite shore.

When Cattolica was at length reached, a pleasant reception compensated the travellers for all the fatigue they had undergone. The officer to whom they were led was acquainted with the writings of Goldoni, and treated their author with courteous respect. He at once gave up the luggage demanded, and secured for husband and wife a safe conduct through the camp, only stipulating that they should not return to Pesaro. They had no desire to return there to the harsh comfort of the granary loft, and at once rejoined the friends so recently parted with at Rimini. That place was now in the hands of the Austrians, but they were just as much in need of amusement as their enemies. They engaged Goldoni to arrange a fête for them, handsomely recompensing him for his services. He was quite ready, apparently, to earn a livelihood by any honest means, and no doubt would have written plays or sermons with equal indifference.

He was now upon the world again without occupation. His engagement at the Venice theatre had ceased. His consulate had been asked for by a merchant willing to work without pay; he had resigned it at once to the new candidate. What step should he next take?

It was not with him a subject for long or grave deliberation. Like a truant schoolboy who finds himself a long way from home, and being so, thinks he may as

well extend his ramble, Goldoni determined to gratify a wish he had cherished many years to visit Tuscany.

Light of heart and of purse, but well stored with hope and energy, with a fond and dear companion by his side, he set out for Florence.

## CHAP. VIII.

## RETURN TO THE STAGE.

THE same motive which nearly thirty years afterwards led Alfieri to Florence, directed Goldoni towards that city. It was the city of all Italy where the purest Tuscan was spoken. Accustomed to the corrupt but musical dialect of his native place, the Venetian dramatist wished to acquire a more correct language in which to embody his conceptions. He remained in Florence several months, delighted with all he saw and heard. What time he devoted to the study of the Tuscan tongue he does not say. His industry, we may gather from after evidences, was not very great. Passing through Sienna to witness an improvisation by the celebrated Perfetti, he arrived at Pisa. He intended to remain only three days. Circumstances, however, occurred to keep him there as many years. The thread of events which united them was slight indeed; but with what frail bands are not our lives oftentimes bound up!

Walking through the street one day he saw a long line of carriages drawn up outside a courtyard, and many persons entering there. He asked what was taking place, and received for reply that the meeting of a literary society was being held. He asked if he might enter, and was told that he was quite at liberty to do so. He went in and found himself in a garden containing a

kind of bower, of considerable dimensions, in which a large number of people were seated. It was the gathering-place of a society which, in the midst of the cares and duties of town life, sought to revive the pastoral delights of Arcadian pleasure. That society was called the *Colonia Alfea*, from the name of a river celebrated in Greece which watered the ancient Pisa in Aulis. Greece in imagination belonged to the society. The members took each a name from its history. They divided the country amongst them, gathering from it a perpetual harvest of laurel. The Turks might gather in the corn, the grapes, and other unpoetic products, and laugh at the other reapers if they felt so disposed.

At Goldoni's approach all eyes were turned towards him, as if in inquiry of his name and purpose. Pleased doubtless by this attention, he felt a strong desire to gratify the general curiosity and distinguish himself at the same time. He asked if a stranger might be permitted to express in verse the pleasure he felt at finding himself in such agreeable company. There was not the slightest objection to such a proceeding, was the assurance given him. Of assurance of another kind he seems to have been in no want. Introducing a few allusions to adapt it more completely to the occasion, he recited a poem he had written, when a boy, for a somewhat similar circumstance. The poem had all the appearance of an impromptu, and was much applauded. At its close everybody crowded round the author to praise him for his performance. He made at once a hundred friends by this lucky hit.

The "Shepherds of Arcadia," for so they called themselves, were under the guidance of a pastor, or head shepherd. All united in showing friendship to Goldoni. They invited him to their houses; he dined with one,

supped with another, was received like a brother shepherd everywhere. Nay more, his new acquaintances begged him to live amongst their flock. They had grown aware that he had formerly followed the profession of advocate; they pressed him to follow it again. Every support was promised him. The peaceful shepherds would have quarrelled amongst themselves, apparently, in order to bring him briefs.

What could Goldoni reply to all this kind feeling? He had been destined for medicine; he had abandoned medicine for law; he had left law for diplomacy; he had gone from diplomacy to the stage; from the stage he was now beckoned back to law. Of what consequence to him the profession he followed? His was the happy disposition that readily accommodates itself to every change of circumstance. Had he been appointed ambassador to a country where clothes were considered a useless incumbrance, he would have appeared in the costume of Adam the very first evening of his arrival.

Goldoni yielded to pastoral persuasion. He resumed the legal robe and wig. The bar of Pisa was free to him, as indeed to every other foreign licentiate. He established himself as civil and criminal advocate. His new friends had not promised better than they could perform. They brought more business than he could conduct. His affairs prospered so much that less successful rivals looked upon him with an envious eye.

Everything seemed, for a time, to estrange him from the stage. A company of comedians came to the town, and for a moment his old love for the drama revived. It was only for a moment. The unhappy actors played one of his pieces; played it so badly that it failed. The author was deeply mortified; but he increased in assiduity towards his legal business, and with such good

effect, that in the same month he gained three different causes.

Goldoni had become more wedded to his new calling, and was growing every day more indifferent to that he had last quitted, when he received a letter from the celebrated performer Sacchi, asking him to write a piece for Venice. He had written before for Sacchi, and with great success. He was fired by the proposal. Flying with ardour to comply with it, he worked at night, so that he should not neglect his legal labours. But those labours lost charm in his eyes from that day. He still continued to reside in Pisa. He still attended its Arcadian Academy, reciting odes and stanzas, a species of barley-corn rent for the ideal territory that had been allotted to him. But the dramatic desires had begun to smoulder. It wanted but a breath to fan them into a blaze. The winds of chance did not long withhold that breath. An appointment became vacant at Pisa. It was that of advocate to several religious establishments, with good fixed salary and emoluments attached. Goldoni strove to obtain it, regarding his position as precarious and unsatisfactory. He was not successful, and felt annoyed. He thought his friends should better have supported him, and he looked forward to a speedy separation from them.

About the same time another circumstance occurred, of a far more agreeable nature, but tending not less strongly to direct his thoughts back again towards the stage. He was surprised one day by a visit from a tall, stout stranger of very eccentric manner. The stranger addressed Goldoni in terms of the most extravagant courtesy, and embellished his discourse with gestures as extravagantly grotesque. He was a comedian, he said, a Pantalone; his name was Darbes; he wanted Goldoni



to write a piece for him. Goldoni tried to excuse himself on account of professional duties. The other would not hear a word of such objections. Goldoni took time to decide, and at last resolved to comply with the Pantalone's request. He announced this by writing, and at once received a reply full of the most ludicrous expressions of gratitude and pleasure.

"I shall have then," wrote this oddity, "a comedy by Goldoni. That will be the lance and buckler with which I shall go and face all the theatres of the world. How happy I am ! I betted a hundred ducats with my manager that I should have a piece by Goldoni. If I gain the wager, he pays and the piece is mine. I am young ; I am not yet sufficiently known, it is true ; but I will go to Venice, and defy all the Pantalones there to match me. Rubini at St. Luke, Corrini at St. Samuel. I will go and attack Ferramonti at Bologna, Pasini at Milan, Bellotti, called Tiziani, in Tuscany. I will go even to Golinetti in his retirement, and Garelli in his tomb."

It was pleasant work to write for such an enthusiast as this, and Goldoni soon completed what had been asked of him. He carried the piece to Leghorn, where the actor was playing, and was received by him with much outrageous ceremony, delight, and reverence. The manager of the theatre, Signor Medebac, was equally flattering in behaviour. He sought out Goldoni, who was at dinner, begged him to leave the humble inn fare, and dine at the managerial residence. Darbes entered at the same moment, and tried to entice Goldoni towards another direction and another dinner. The dramatist was excited to laughter by such eager attention and civility.

Signor Medebac extended his courtesies beyond the

range of the dinner table. He made a formal proposition to engage Goldoni as play writer. There were two comedy theatres, he said, at Venice. He would take a third for five years if Goldoni would agree to write for him. The terms were named, and proved satisfactory to the author. Like a good husband, however, he consulted his wife upon the subject before deciding. She offered no objection, and the contract was signed in the month of September, 1746.

Before starting to enter upon the different life which this engagement was to open out to him, Goldoni settled all his affairs at Pisa, and then went to take a last look at Florence. While there he was witness, at one of the academies, of a species of literary amusement which deserves a brief description. It was called the *Sibillone*. A young child, of ten to twelve years of age, was seated upon a chair in the midst of a large assembly. She was the Sibillone, or grand Sibyl. A person chosen at hazard from the company asked her a question. She replied to it by a single word, uttered in sport, and having no connection perhaps with the subject upon which she was interrogated. The amusement consisted in the skill by which the academicians proved, or endeavoured to prove, the appropriateness of the Sibyl's response, however unfit and ridiculous it might appear. Upon this occasion the child was asked "why women weep more frequently and more readily than men?" Her reply was light enough. It was simply "straw."

An academician on the instant rose, and, with great appearance of conviction, declared that no answer could be more decisive or more satisfactory! He spoke for about three quarters of an hour. He commenced by analysing the structure of various plants. He stated that straw was more fragile than any other. He passed

from straw to woman. He gave, in a manner as clear as it was rapid, a species of anatomical essay upon the human body. He described the source of tears in both sexes. He showed the delicacy of the fibres in the one, the resistance in the other. He finished by flattering the ladies present, by giving to weakness the superiority in point of sensibility, and took care to say no syllable about tears that are produced at will. The speaker was an abbot and a scholar, about forty years of age. He argued with as much eloquence and power as though the weightiest question had been before him.

Goldoni was delighted and surprised; he seems to have enjoyed the exhibition as an intellectual treat. Had he reflected, he might, perhaps, have felt that there was more to humiliate than to gratify in such a display. It tells very little for the mental freedom of a country, when men of advanced years can be found to waste their powers in such elaborate trifling. We may applaud young men who, fresh from school, and burning to rival the eloquence of a Cicero or the stirring declamation of a Burke, thunder forth in a mimic parliament fierce philippics directed towards two dozen adversaries and a green baize table. Such recreation tends to keep minds steady which otherwise might be sadly rocked and tossed about upon the charmed sea of pleasure. But a man of forty has, or should have, too many duties weighing upon him to need any other moral ballast. We might introduce such a game as the *Sibillone* amongst us; but it would be at Christmas time, and the Little Ones would be the chief performers.

## CHAP. IX.

## DRAMATIC LABOURS.

FROM Florence, Goldoni passed to Padua, where he was expected by Medebac. The air of the place not suiting him, he set out after a month's stay for Modena, satisfactorily arranged his affairs there with the Ducal Bank, and betook himself once more to his native city. He commenced his labours for the theatre of Signor Medebac with ardour. The piece he had written for the eccentric comedian Darbes was a failure. He strove to counterbalance this defeat by at once writing another piece. He did so, and it was successful. He followed up that success by a new piece, which obtained equal favour. The first season ended. The manager was delighted. He saw the stability of his enterprise assured. He felt that his company had already established itself in the good graces of the Venetian public. Goldoni was not less pleased; but he knew that there were powerful rivals to compete with, and that great exertion would be necessary in order to maintain a place by the side of them. Envious critics of the new theatre had contemptuously called its performers a company of "strollers." Great and decided successes were necessary in order to disarm the influence of such criticism. During the next season Goldoni laboured hard to give the theatre an increased reputation. He commenced with a piece, the "Vedova Scaltra," which ably led the way in this direc-

tion. It was received with unanimous satisfaction, and enjoyed the honour of thirty consecutive representations. Success did not make Goldoni relax his exertions. A piece, containing all the worst faults of the style he wished to see abolished, was produced at one of the other theatres. It was poor in every way ; but it was a national or, as we should say, a "legitimate" piece, and the public was pleased with it. Goldoni, anxious to show the merits of his own manner, wrote a piece upon the same subject ; taking care, of course, to treat it in a very different style. He had the satisfaction of finding that his piece was welcomed favourably. But success could not fail to give him enemies. He was aiming at a higher position than the writers whose productions then filled the stage. Every hand was outstretched, of course, to pull him down. The names of Aristotle, of Horace, and of Castelvetro were dinned in his ears. He was seriously lectured upon the unity of action and the unity of time, and gravely taken to task upon the unity of place. Goldoni had very simple ideas upon all these nightmares, and he expressed them as simply. He did not find, he said, in Horace or in Aristotle rules to fetter his invention. He made such use of them as he thought necessary, conforming or deviating as circumstances seemed to require. His motto was, never to sacrifice a comedy that might be good to a precedent that might render it bad. There must indeed be something of the slave in any man who blindly follows the rules of writers who have preceded him, however commanding the talent of those writers may be. But there must be something of the tyrant in him who would compel observance of those rules. Imagination is not to be drilled and bullied into obedience like an awkward squad. It may be gently led. It will never be harshly driven.

Goldoni's critics were not long before they stooped to

attack him in a less pleasant manner than before. His "Vedova Scaltra" in the third season of Medebac was revived with much success. A rival theatre produced another version of it in which the best things of the original were stolen without acknowledgment, Goldoni tells us, while the author was abused as a blockhead. A crowded audience applauded heartily the piece. Goldoni was present masked. He was stung by the abuse he received, and by what he considered the ingratitude of the public in favouring it. He went home, gave orders that he was not to be disturbed, and sat down to write a reply to the attack made on him. He did not rise from his chair until he had finished it. In this composition he recommended, as a means of preventing the stage from becoming a mere instrument of personality and low abuse, that a dramatic censorship should be established to sit in judgment upon all new pieces before they were represented. A dramatic author proposing a dramatic censorship! Was ever such an anomaly heard of before? We might have thought that Goldoni would have seen, better than most men, that the public is the only real censor. But passion and pique generally produce mental blindness. A censor was appointed.

This discussion, and the feelings it naturally excited, interfered to some extent with Goldoni's powers of production. Scarcely any novelty had been played during the season. The only new piece produced after the pamphlet proved a failure. The public showed some signs of dissatisfaction at this neglect. Goldoni was piqued. He determined to astonish all Venice by an extraordinary achievement. On the last night of the season he announced in very doubtful verse, but in very positive terms, that during the next season he would write and produce *sixteen new pieces*!



He was known to keep rigidly to his word, and his promise was at once accepted. In eight days all the boxes were let for the following year. Nevertheless, the amount of labour he had allotted to himself startled even his most sanguine friends; made his enemies smile derisively. Each piece was to be in three acts, and was to occupy about two hours and a half in representation. It was in truth no light task.

Had Goldoni been an English dramatist of the present day, writing for the English stage, it would have been facile and agreeable enough. He would have collected a number of new French plays, latest productions of the Paris theatres, from the stately "Français" to the gamesome "Bouffes Parisiens" or "Folies Nouvelles." He would have carefully examined these charmingly fresh and pure constructions. He would have altered a few incidents, changed French names into English, substituted St. James's Park for the *Allée des Veuves*, and refrigerated ideas too glowing for icy English ears. These transformations finished, he would have set himself to the work of translation. Working blithesomely as a government official, and the same number of hours per day, he might with gentlemanly ease have finished a three-act play each week. He would have put his name to it, as the author, with a modesty worthy of all praise, and have enjoyed the golden fruits of his labours with a tranquil and contented heart. Instead of sixteen, he might, with a little extra exertion, have produced sixty such new pieces in the course of the year.

Poor Goldoni was, however, in a very different position. He could use French plays but sparingly. There was a wide gulf between Paris and the Bride of the Sea; between those who filled the pit of the Théâtre Français and the frequenters of St. Angelo. Incidents which

might have suited very well in the *Café de Foi* or the Tuileries Gardens would have been quite out of place in the Square of St. Mark or on the Grand Canal. An Italian public would not have accepted pictures of foreign manners as representations of their own. They were too much attached to their long-established national pieces to receive altogether without a murmur a change which was of home invention, and which did not attempt to lead the drama away from home ideas. Foreign pieces thrown hastily into an Italian mould, but with the marks of their original impression still strongly exhibited, would not have been tolerated for a moment. What a pity London of to-day is not like, in this respect, Venice of the last century!

Goldoni had, then, little except his own inventive faculty to rely upon; and when he undertook the extraordinary labour he had imposed upon himself, he was so unprepared for it that he had not a single idea in his mind. He had in the first place to accompany his manager into Lombardy to search for a new performer in place of Darbes, who had left them. There was then to instruct him in the new style of acting which Goldoni's pieces required. When not thus engaged, the hopeful dramatist worked night and day at new pieces. Five months passed thus, and manager and author returned to Venice. The season commenced. The first new piece was produced. It was a kind of prologue to the rest; introduced the actors and actresses in their own persons to talk about the affairs of the theatre and the promise of the previous season, and to give an assurance that that promise should be faithfully performed. The opening piece was applauded; and in a few days was followed by another, which met with the same reception. The third piece, "*La Bottega di Cafè*," soon

succeeded, and was more favourably received than the two preceding. Its success was indeed brilliant; but some allusions in it were interpreted unfavourably by various people, and Goldoni was threatened with punishment, even with assassination. Curiosity, however, to see if he would be able to keep his promise seems to have prevailed over annoyance, and he met with no interruption.

Goldoni's fourth piece, based upon "Le Menteur" of Corneille, but deviating considerably from that work, was next produced. It had all the success he could desire; and he followed in the same path, by choosing a "flatterer" for the subject of his fifth piece. Fifth and sixth followed in the steps of their predecessors, and the seventh next engaged his attention. "Pamela" had just made its way into Italy, had been translated, and was the talk of every circle. Goldoni fixed upon it as a good subject for the stage, and at once dramatised it. He was forced to take some liberties with the author, but the interest of the story remained the same. The piece, resembling the modern *drame* of the French stage, was a novelty in Venice. It obtained the most gratifying success. Indeed, the audience were so carried away by it, that they would scarcely listen to anything else, and Goldoni's eighth and ninth pieces obtained scarcely a hearing. His enemies were not slow to take advantage of this circumstance. They published some fresh attacks against him; they talked everywhere in his dispraise; "he had lost his power;" "he was beginning to decline;" "he would finish badly;" "his pride would be humiliated." He took little heed, but kept steadily to his work. The tenth piece silenced his detractors, and astonished himself; he could scarcely believe that, with so little time, he could have written such a successful production. But

the next was equally happy, and its successor, "*La Donna Prudenta*," took a place by its side.

Goldoni had finished twelve pieces; he was not yet wearied, but his friends began to tremble for him. As "*Pamela*" had been so successful, they advised him to dramatise another romance, in order to spare himself the trouble of invention. He was too much flushed by the triumph he had already obtained to heed such advice, and replied, that he preferred to write a piece which might serve as the subject of a romance, instead of reading a romance which might serve as the subject of a piece. His friends smiled, but the undaunted dramatist sat himself down to write. He had not, he assures us, a single idea. A crowd, however, soon came to him. He selected the first arrivals, and, without stopping to arrange them in order, commenced, as he says, to build a vast edifice, scarcely knowing whether he was erecting a temple or a market. One event, however, led to another; the first act took shape; the second act followed; it then became necessary to think of the catastrophe. In a short time the entire work was finished. The public was satisfied with it, and people declared that four large volumes in octavo might be filled with the development of its incidents.

The fourteenth and fifteenth pieces soon issued from Goldoni's hands, and did not do discredit to his reputation. There only remained the sixteenth and concluding piece. It was not ready for representation until the last night of the season. That was a night of triumph to Goldoni. An enormous crowd flocked to the house; the prices of the boxes were tripled and quadrupled. When the curtain fell, the applause was so tumultuous, that people in the street imagined a real

disturbance to be taking place in the theatre. The audience did not stop at mere applause. They rushed to the box where Goldoni sat, surrounded by sympathising friends; they took him upon their shoulders; they carried him away in triumph, overwhelming him with a torrent of compliments he tried in vain to check.

Poor Goldoni! he laboured for a crown of straw, and won it.

## CHAP. X.

## AFTER THE BATTLE.

GOLDONI had won his battle, but he had suffered not a little in the fight. His nerves were shaken, his health was generally impaired; he never fully recovered from the effects of such extraordinary labour to his latest day. He had only gained, too, a barren victory of praise. Having made no arrangement for extra remuneration, Medebac refused to allow him any! Not a sequin would he give him beyond his appointed stipend. Nay more, he showed so little gratitude for the services rendered him, that when Goldoni wished to print his plays, as a means of recompensing himself for his arduous labour, the ungenerous manager refused to permit him. The right of printing those productions belonged to him, he said, for he had bought them. As a great favour, he at last allowed Goldoni to print one volume a year. The ill-treated author said little in the way of complaint, but felt the more. He resolved to part from Medebac as soon as his engagement was at an end.

Goldoni had need of recreation and change of scene after his year of hard work. He went, accordingly, to Turin, where the company of the manager had gone. But he did not long remain idle. His pieces were played there, and were much admired. But the Turinese, wishing to be more critical than their neighbours,



qualified their praise in a way Goldoni did not like. "He is very good," said these judges; "but he is not Molière." He had never aspired to rank with the great French dramatist, and felt piqued by a comparison he thought uncalled for. He determined to show, however, that he was acquainted with Molière, and admired his genius; and for this purpose he composed a comedy, introducing some of the most interesting incidents of the poet's life. In common with all the writers of the time, he adopted the mistaken idea that Molière loved the daughter of Madeline Béjart. So, up to that time, biography had written it; so was it received by France. Not until some twenty years of the present century had rolled away, did the researches of M. Beffara place this matter in a true light. Now, it is well known that Armande Béjart, whom Molière married, was the sister, not the daughter, of Madeline Béjart, with whom he is said at one time to have been on terms of tender intimacy.

"Molière" was well received by the Turinese; whether it gave them a much higher opinion of Goldoni, or linked him closer in their minds with the author upon whom he had written, may be doubted. Before their judgment was pronounced,—before, indeed, the piece was produced,—the writer of it had left the city, and was at Genoa. He remained there all the summer, and then returned again to his post in Venice, preparing novelties for the autumn season of 1751. Pieces flowed from his pen with accustomed rapidity, and were in general well received. His critics continued to attack him occasionally, but their sallies caused him less annoyance than formerly. With the termination of this season, his engagement with

Medebac came to an end. The manager tried in vain to retain him. Goldoni had fully resolved to part company with his ungenerous patron, and would listen to none of the arguments brought forward in order to turn him from his purpose. He made an engagement with Signor Vendramini, proprietor of another Venetian theatre, that of St. Luke. His position was much improved by this change; his income was nearly doubled, he had full liberty to print his works, and was perfectly unconstrained in his movements.

The first spare time which his new engagement allowed him, he employed in preparing for the press another volume of his plays. Two had already appeared. The third was soon ready. He carried it to his bookseller, but, to his surprise, the man would not accept the manuscript. Medebac had bought him over, and he declared that it was with Medebac alone he could negotiate for the sale of Goldoni's plays. Goldoni first thought of applying to the law for redress under these circumstances; but he would have had to plead against two opponents, who, he feared, would not scruple to employ any chicanery to defeat him. He took, therefore, a far more simple and certain course. Instead of the law cheating him, he cheated the law. He went to Florence, gave his plays into the hands of a bookseller there, and made arrangements for the publication of a new edition with him. This edition, smuggled into Venice in defiance of the authorities, was eagerly purchased. We find that Goldoni had five hundred subscribers in that city alone. Seventeen hundred copies of the ten volumes, which formed the edition, were ultimately sold.

Upon his entry into the theatre of St. Luke, Goldoni experienced a slight check. The company was new to

him, and was unaccustomed to his style. The house was larger than that he had been used to, and did not permit of precisely the same effects. He saw that his pieces must afford more opportunity for scenic display than formerly, and he looked about for a subject that would serve this purpose. An English history of Persia had recently been translated into Italian. He found in its pages materials just adapted to his wishes. "*La Sposa Persiana*," a romantic comedy, was the result of his reading. It contained in itself attractions of so many different kinds, and was altogether so new to the Italian stage, that its success was unbounded. So often was it represented, that some of the audience were able at last to transcribe it from memory. Several copies made in this manner were printed. When the piece at length began to lose its attraction, the public clamoured for a sequel to it. They had been much interested in one of the heroines. They wanted to see a further development of her career. Goldoni, pleased with the demand, hastened to comply with it. In another piece, the scene of which was laid in Persia, he led the popular heroine through a series of fresh incidents that caused as much gratification as the first. But the public were not yet satisfied. Their favourite was well and comfortably married. But would she be happy? It was a question Goldoni alone could settle. He settled it to the great satisfaction of all Venice. Like Falstaff, the Persian lady was carried into a third piece. This last was even more successful than its two predecessors, and brought the adventures of the popular Persian to a close.

Goldoni spared no exertion in order to deserve the support of the new audience he was writing for. He worked so hard indeed, that, being then only imperfectly recovered from the effects of his previous labour, he fell

ill, and was obliged to recreate himself by a trip to Modena. He was subject to nervous feelings—only too common, alas! to those who work much with the brain—which oftentimes filled his mind with the most acute and morbid melancholy. Unfortunately for his complaint, which grows never so rapidly as when fed by sympathy, he became acquainted, on his return to Venice, with a new actor of the company, in the same state as himself. They spent much of their time together comparing and analysing their symptoms; dangerous occupation, as both soon discovered. The new actor's nervousness sprang from a different source from that of Goldoni. He wished to undertake important characters, but was withheld by fear of failure. He yielded at length to his ambition, and appeared before the audience. His reception was most favourable. He obtained the applause of the house. But the excitement, acting upon nerves already unstrung, proved too much for him. Immediately he had withdrawn from the stage, on the termination of the piece, he fell down dead!

The event produced a deep impression throughout the theatre. News of it spread rapidly from box to box. People were filled with horror at a catastrophe so unexpected and so sudden. But Goldoni was the most affected. It acted like madness upon his mind. The worst symptoms of his complaint immediately manifested themselves. He seemed at once to lose all control over himself. A thousand gloomy thoughts took possession of his brain. A thousand ghostly phantoms troubled his repose. Misery, despair, powerless wretchedness, seemed his portion for the rest of life's journey. He grew seriously ill in body as well as mind; and no remedies seemed capable of restoring him. Fortunately, his medical attendant understood the real nature of the

case. He waited until the first shock had passed away, until his patient was a little calmed in spirit; and then used the only medicine which could be efficacious in such circumstances—medicine applied to the reason of the sufferer.

“Regard your malady,” said he, “as a child who comes to attack you, a naked sword in hand. Be on your guard, and he will inflict no wound; but if you present your breast to him, he will kill you.”

That doctor was a clever man. His words deserve enduring record. Let all who labour with the brain take them well to heart! That one sentence is worth pages of the *Pharmacopœia*. It made a lasting impression upon Goldoni. He acted upon the advice it expressed, and ere long was relieved of his oppressive melancholy. Whenever afterwards attacked, he followed the same course, and always with the happiest results. Had he once surrendered himself to the fretting demon who lurks more less in every nature, by what imperceptible but certain steps he would have been led away until he arrived at that sad mental state which is not perfect madness, but which, in its incompleteness, is even a deeper mockery of human reason! Once arrived at that fatal point, there would have been no receding. The child would have killed the man. Deeper and deeper the dull darkness would have grown day by day, until death came at length, for very pity's sake, to shut out the last glimmerings of light.

How many spirits have not passed thus gloomily from Life!

## CHAP. XI.

## DEPARTURE FROM VENICE.

EITHER as a consequence of this illness or of the exhaustion of ideas following upon too rapid invention, one of the pieces which Goldoni shortly afterwards produced was a failure of the most humiliating kind. The piece was scarcely heard to the end; and when the curtain fell, loud hisses arose on every side. The comments made upon this circumstance by the enemies of Goldoni were amusing. "He is used up," said one. "He has emptied his sack," said another. While a third, adopting a mysterious tone, declared that "his portfolio was exhausted,"—the portfolio of manuscripts which had furnished him with the subjects of his plays, as the speaker afterwards explained. But Goldoni resolved to show these hasty sextons of genius, that their solemn statements were not entitled to much credit. He went home, passed the night inventing a story, and at the dawn announced a new five-act comedy, entitled "Il Festino." He sent it to the theatre act by act as completed; on the fifth day the piece was played. Its success was sufficient to prove that Goldoni's sack had still a few things left in it, and that the portfolio was not yet exhausted.

But critics still continued to attack him for the system he was steadily introducing. At Bologna, the favourite home of the old masks, he was much assailed. He became wearied and disgusted with the



controversy he excited, and from that time resolved to compromise matters by writing now in the new style and now in the old, convinced that in the end his own system would prevail. His fame, in spite of the attacks to which he was subjected, increased from day to day, and was carried far beyond the scenes of his triumphs. In 1756 he went to Parma at the instance of the prince of that place, who wished him to write three pieces for a theatre he had established there. Goldoni gave such satisfaction that the prince granted him a pension for life, and a decoration. At Parma, he saw for the first time the performances of French comedians. Their finished style of acting caused him great pleasure. Indeed he was so carried away on the occasion of his first visit, that in the midst of breathless stillness he expressed his gratification by crying "Bravo!" in a loud voice. The house was shocked at such an interruption. The prince, who was present, ordered search to be made for the offender. When he was discovered, the disturbance took quite a new shape, and Goldoni became the object of general admiration.

Upon his return to Venice, highly gratified by the result of his journey, he found a report of his death generally circulating. Nay, a monk, with very strong imagination or very weak morality, declared he had been present at the unfortunate author's funeral! The appearance of Goldoni, however, alive, well, and bearing fresh marks of favour upon him, put an end to these statements. But his enemies, annoyed probably that their troublesome rival had not met with the fate reported, began to worry him anew. As their old complaints were becoming rather tattered, they put out new banners of criticism. They reproached him for not writing in the pure Tuscan prescribed by the Academy della

Crusca. Goldoni could not attempt to deny the charge. He had studied for four years at Pisa in order to perfect himself in that language. But the agreeable and seducing *patois* of Venice—which, as Count Orloff in his work on Music says, is the sweetest of all local languages heard in Italy; that is to say, the sweetest in Europe—would cling to him. He remembered, however, that Tasso had been tormented all his life for the same fault, and that his “Jerusalem Delivered,” full of deviations from Della Cruscan rule, was read everywhere, and his “Jerusalem Conquered,” which conformed to it, was almost utterly neglected. It was by no means a convincing proof either in favour or against the Della Cruscans, but it seems to have been sufficient to console Goldoni. He came at once to the conclusion that it was better to write so that he might be understood by all Italy, than to write in a manner that would be appreciated only by the critical few. Had he said he was more inclined to use his own shoes for walking than to put on the “learned sock,” with the use of which he was only partially acquainted, he would have perhaps indicated the case more clearly.

If the researches he made upon this subject answered no other end, they at least suggested to him a new subject for a comedy. The Life of Tasso presented itself to him, and he dramatised it with great success.

Parma was not the only city in which his reputation had made him admirers. His fame had travelled to Rome; and in the spring of 1758, accepting an engagement there, he travelled after it. Permission once gained from his manager at Venice, Goldoni started off on his journey. Rome pleased him highly. He carried with him letters of introduction to many distinguished people, who received him in the most gracious manner.

He had even the honour of an introduction to the pope himself,—an introduction followed by a private interview of three quarters of an hour's duration. But he almost spoiled the good impression he produced upon the mind of Clement XIII. by an unlucky piece of forgetfulness. His Holiness gave the signal that the conversation was to come to an end. Goldoni rose, made his reverences, and prepared to depart. The pope looked annoyed, he changed his position, he moved his arms, he coughed, he looked hard at his guest. The unhappy dramatist was at a loss to conceive the meaning of these signs. A light suddenly burst in upon his brain. He had omitted to kiss the pope's Toe! He rushed back, repaired his negligence, and was rewarded by the blessings of the Holy Pontiff.

His visit to Rome was not in other respects successful. The company for which he had been engaged to write, was unused to his style. They played no pieces, except of the old fashion. They were willing however, they said, to learn anything he chose to give them. He wrote a piece; they studied it, and presented it upon their stage. But they had undertaken a task for which they were utterly incapable. Their acting, constrained as it was by bonds to which they were unaccustomed, was overcharged and awkward to the last degree. The audience, composed principally of boatmen and coal-heavers, could not understand it, and hissed with great force. The piece utterly fell; and Goldoni saw that any fresh production of the same class must meet with the same result. The director who had engaged him was compelled to adopt a similar opinion; and nothing more was written. Goldoni had the satisfaction of seeing one of his old plays produced at another theatre with great acclamations. It was "Pamela," which had so

much pleased the Venetians a few years before. The Roman audience was even more pleased; and the actors of the theatre begged Goldoni to introduce "Pamela" in another piece. He complied with their request, but "Pamela married" lost nearly all the attractions she had enjoyed when single.

The air of Rome beginning to disagree with him, Goldoni, after several months' stay, turned his steps once more towards his native city, and renewed his usual occupations there. He was not however fated to remain very long in Venice. Soon quitting it again, he quitted it for good and all this time.

His works had reached Paris, and were in favour there. One of them had been played at the Italian theatre with great success. The company were desirous of securing the services of Goldoni. They offered him an engagement of two years with very satisfactory remuneration, if he would go to Paris. He paused before he accepted this offer. He was fond of his own country; he was esteemed, applauded, and admired there; his critics had almost ceased to trouble him; he was happy and comfortable. But the future was unprovided for; he thought a few years' exertion in Paris would assure it in a more complete manner than he could hope for in Venice. Before determining what course to adopt, he spoke to his friends and patrons. He explained to them the precarious position he held, and pointed out the necessity he was under of guaranteeing himself against poverty in his old age. He showed that there were many places of importance and trust which his knowledge of the law would enable him satisfactorily to fill. If they would appoint him to one of these, he need not leave Venice. His friends felt the justness of these views, and strove to obtain him some engagement;

but they did not succeed in their exertions. Goldoni made up his mind therefore to accept the offer sent to him from Paris. His friends testified in an unmistakable manner the regard in which they held him. On the night previous to his departure, a farewell piece he had written was produced. At its conclusion they so applauded that Goldoni was moved to tears. Expressions of kind feeling and good wishes for his prosperity were heard on every side.

But there were other circumstances in operation at this time which he does not allude to in his "Memoirs," but which evidently in part, if not entirely, influenced his determination to quit Venice.

Among the most determined opponents of his literary system were the members of an academy at Venice, established in 1740 under the ridiculous name of the Silly Fellows. These academicians seem to have been quite as frivolous as those who figured in the ceremony of the Sibillone; and there was a dash of humour in their proceedings which gave the institution more the air of a social club than of a learned assembly. For president they selected a silly old writer, remarkable for the ridiculous verses he had composed. He became the butt of all the rest. The most absurd and exaggerated compliments were paid to his genius. When he read any rhapsody he had written, the satirical applause that greeted his production was deafening. He sat upon an elevated chair which he was made to believe Cardinal Bembo had formerly used, but which in fact had been bought second-hand. At the summer sittings of the academy he was supplied with a cup of boiling tea; the other members had ices. In the winter, while all the rest were drinking coffee, he was treated to a cup of cold water. Occasionally some of the most waggish



of the comedians wrote him complimentary letters in verse, purporting to come from the great Frederick the King of Prussia, the Sultan, the Sophi, and other potentates.

The academicians did, however, something else than play at such jesting as this. When their mock ceremonies were over, they discussed literary questions, they criticised new works, they wrote and read verses, discourses, biographies. There was really some purpose at the bottom of all their fooling.

One of the most active of these academicians was Count Carlo Gozzi. Fond of literature, and himself something of a poet, he had conceived a strong aversion to the school of dramatic writing Goldoni was introducing. This aversion soon broke out into open hostility. He wrote an allegorical poem attacking Goldoni. A friend obtained possession of it, sent it for publication to Paris; and one morning the work arrived in Venice. In two hours it was circulating over all the city, and became the one topic of conversation. Goldoni of course replied to it; and a regular literary war commenced between the two. The hot blood with which such disputes are always conducted in Italy, is a feature in the literary history of that country. We may be quite sure that if Gozzi called Goldoni's theatre a nursery of immorality, of pernicious principles, of bad sentiments, and the author, a pillager of every foreign stage, who had destroyed the *Commedie dell' Arte* which did honour to Italy, and substituted in its place a bastard drama, contrary to the genius of the country, we may be quite sure, if such was Gozzi's language, Goldoni retorted by calling his adversary's arguments "froth," "serpent's slime," "howling," and that adversary himself an "insupportable fellow, a poor devil who had sought fortune in vain." The battle did not stop here. Goldoni had a means of



annoying the enemy which the enemy did not possess. He was the playwright of a company. He could direct his attacks from the stage itself. He did so, ridiculed Gozzi in prologues delivered with much effect at the theatre. Gozzi feeling himself at a disadvantage, sought to fight his enemy upon the same ground. Fortunately for him an opportunity soon offered. The celebrated comedian Sacchi, with a good company of actors accustomed to play in the old style, had been driven out of Italy by the introduction of Goldoni's system. Seeking refuge in Portugal, they had left that country precipitately on account of the Lisbon earthquake. They were now in Venice without employ. Gozzi determined to make a bold attempt to revive the *Commedie dell' Arte*, and try to beat Goldoni out of the field. He made arrangements with the company of Sacchi. He wrote them a new piece of a kind that had never before been attempted, and yet introducing the four standard characters and their improvisations — a piece founded upon a popular nursery story. The success of it was prodigious. Goldoni's theatre was almost deserted. Everybody flocked to see the "Love of the Three Oranges," as the play was called. Another and another piece followed in the same style and with the same success. All Goldoni's labours seemed destroyed at a single blow. The improvised pieces, set in a more and more attractive frame, had gone back at a stride into public favour. We can believe, then, that something more than the inability or unwillingness of his friends to obtain him a post at Venice determined Goldoni to set out for Paris. His reputation seemed at an end. His works were no longer in favour. A more fortunate rival had obtained possession of the public ear. What else could he do but leave the city?

## CHAP. XII.

## ARRIVAL IN FRANCE.

It was in the month of April, 1761, that Goldoni set out from Venice, with his wife and his nephew, for the capital city of France. When within a few miles of that city, he was met by a party of Italian comedians, who gave him a warm welcome after his long and fatiguing journey. Everything at first seemed smiling in the new land in which he had arrived. When he reached Paris he felt as though he were in a city of enchantment. He was fifty-three years of age, but was strong, healthy, and vigorous, and had all the fresh feeling of a school-boy. The weather was unusually hot, quite as much so as in Italy; but he heeded it not. He roamed on from street to street, from promenade to promenade, from building to building, amazed, delighted, confused with all he saw. The Paris of a hundred years ago was far from being the splendid city of to-day. But Goldoni for a time was never tired of its beauties. For four months he lived in a constant whirl of excitement, without the power of arranging his thoughts or applying himself to intellectual labour. He has left us many little details of Paris as it was at that time, which are exceedingly interesting. He tells us of the celebrated chestnut tree in the Palais Royal, called the tree of Cracow. Underneath its shade a crowd of quid-nuncs collected every day, reading the journals, discussing the political news of the hour, draw-

ing with their canes upon the sand, trenches, camps, military positions, and re-arranging the map of Europe with wonderful precision. When, owing to improvements which took place at a later day, the tree was doomed to fall beneath the axe, a strong excitement was created among those frequenters of the Palais Royal. It seemed little short of sacrilege to rob them of their favourite shelter. The affairs of Europe were obliged to stand still, while the discomfited gossipers recovered from their shock.

We have many glimpses of the theatre of those days which are not without interest. At the Opera and at the Théâtre Français the pit audience stood during the whole of the performance. When the latter theatre quitted the Tuileries and took up its abode in the Faubourg St. Germain, the frequenters thought it quite an innovation that the pit should be seated! Double price too, was charged for this accommodation; and for some time it seemed doubtful whether the new arrangements would answer. We learn too that the favourite complaint of grumbling old playgoers—dearth of good actors—was just as rife then as at any time either before or since. At the Français, which Goldoni constantly attended, people were always mingling their groans upon this subject. “There were no longer any great performers,” they lachrymoniously complained—“the mould in which they had been cast was broken.” This was said too at a time when we find that the French stage boasted such names as Préville (the Roscius of France), Molé, Lekain, Mademoiselle Clairon, and Mademoiselle Dumesnil! But then, people said the same thing in England when Kemble and Mrs. Siddons were treading the stage.

It was during Goldoni’s residence in Paris that the

Ambigu-Comique first opened its doors, commencing modestly as a theatre of marionnettes, and that the Porte St. Martin, that celebrated temple of *drame* started into existence. It then bore the name of Variétés Amusantes. Another theatre, the Salle Nicolet stood near it, but has long since disappeared. A strange place that Salle Nicolet must have been ! What would be thought in the present day, if even at the Funambules, one of the lowest of the Paris theatres, an actor should step forward before the commencement of the piece, and ask one of the audience for the loan of his hat or paletot. Yet something similar to this happened at the Salle Nicolet when Goldoni visited it. While patiently waiting for the curtain to rise, a stranger came to him, and politely asked permission to borrow the rather handsome sword he wore. The stranger was an actor of the company. He had to play Coriolanus that night. He was unprovided with a suitable sword. He had taken the liberty of asking Goldoni for his. The request, after some little hesitation, was complied with ; and the gratified actor had the pleasure of appearing in his borrowed plumage. But I must leave, until a more fitting opportunity, these gossiping details, which belong more to the history of the French stage than to the history of Goldoni, and return to my narrative.

Calmed at length, by a visit to Fontainebleau, of the fever the sight of Paris caused him, he commenced the labours he had been engaged to execute. The Italian theatre at Paris was unfortunately not then in very high public favour. It had united itself to the French Opéra Comique. They used the same house, but played on alternate nights. While the Opéra Comique worked hard to deserve popular favour, and gained it, the Italians provided no novelties, gave nothing but worn-out pieces

which had long before lost their attraction ; and they still kept to the old improvised comedies which Goldoni had endeavoured to banish from Italy. As might be expected, on the nights when the Italians played the theatre was deserted ; on the nights of the opera it was full. Goldoni saw that no success could be hoped for unless a total change in the style of performance took place. He explained his ideas to the comedians. Some were in his favour, others opposed him. His views ultimately prevailed ; but they were not well carried out. The actors were unused to the new style of performance, and could not readily adapt their talent to it. Goldoni's first comedy, played under such circumstances, obtained so little favour, that he felt inclined to quit Paris on the instant. But he had engaged himself for two years, and felt bound to hold to his contract. He continued, therefore, to write for the theatre until the term of his engagement had arrived, contributing twenty-four pieces to it during that time ; and then author and actors parted company without much regret on either side.

Goldoni was now without occupation, and began to look about for some engagement to increase the rather small income on which he was compelled to live. He might have found one, doubtless, in Italy ; but he seems to have become attached to Paris, and to have had no desire to quit it. Fortunately, one of his friends possessed influence at court, and obtained for him the post of Italian teacher to the ladies of the Royal family, with an apartment in the palace of Versailles. The post was honourable and distinguished ; Goldoni congratulated himself upon the good fortune which had led him to it. But an accident he met with shortly afterwards seemed at first likely to deprive him of the power to continue his instruction. He had a habit, more less dangerous everywhere, and

objectionable in all places, that of reading while walking. He was engaged in this manner with Rousseau's "*Lettres de la Montagne*," when he suddenly became almost blind. Just sufficient sight remained to enable him to grope his way home; and hoping that in a short time he should entirely recover, he prepared to give a lesson to one of his pupils as if nothing had happened. His agitation could not however escape notice; and he was asked the cause. Afraid to tell, he gave no distinct reply, but took up a book and glanced at its pages. To his horror, they presented to his eyes nothing but an unintelligible blank. He was forced then to own the calamity which had befallen him. Kind attention and care soon alleviated his misfortune. Little by little the use of one of his eyes returned to him. The other remained for ever afterwards sightless.

His duties at Versailles were not heavy. During the first three years of his appointment lessons were continually interrupted by the domestic calamities which occurred in the family of his royal pupils. The death of the Dauphin in December, 1765, was followed by that of the Dauphine, and of the King of Poland, father of the French Queen. There was little need of Goldoni's services in the midst of all the mourning which arose out of these events. A fixed pension of four thousand francs a year was however granted to him, and a present of a hundred louis, after he had served three years. For some time his instruction ceased almost entirely, and he was at liberty to employ his time as he chose. He was not sorry to fill up some of it by writing pieces for the Italian Opera in London. Many of the libretti of the operas of Bertoni, then admired in England, were by Goldoni. He was asked to visit London, by the managers of the theatre; but this he declined. Yet he



was, we learn, well satisfied with the manner in which he was treated by his English connections. An opera he wrote was paid for although not produced. Goldoni was charmed by what he considered a generous act, and attributed it to a gentler influence than usually presides over operatic councils. "The direction," he says, "was in the hands of women; and women," adds the gallant Goldoni, "are amiable everywhere."

That must have been a happy time for Italian Opera in London, when a committee of women ruled its destinies. If the world itself could be placed under similar direction, how soon every country would flow with milk and honey! Better that, however, says Thought, reproving Jest, than to flow, as they so frequently do now, with blood.

## CHAP. XIII.

## LAST LABOURS.

As Goldoni was in the pay of the Court, and, like many in a similar position, did exceedingly little work for the salary he received, he was anxious to show his gratitude for Royal favours by acting the part of Poet Laureate. Upon the marriage of Marie Antoinette in 1770, he wrote some Italian verses in her honour, and had the gratification of seeing them received with pleasure by the lady to whom they were addressed. She gave him to understand, in very good Italian, that he was not unknown to her. He had long had the ambition to compose some verses in French, but after several trials, which disheartened him, gave up the attempt for ever. He was determined, however, to compose some work in that language; naturally enough, his thoughts turned towards the stage. He resolved to write a comedy for the Théâtre Français!

It was a bold idea, which many a younger man might well have recoiled from. Goldoni was sixty-two years of age. He had arrived in France at the age of fifty-three, an age when the energy, if not the intellect, of many men is on the decline. But during those nine years he had well studied the language of his adopted country, and felt no lack of ideas or industry to carry out his design. He applied himself, accordingly, to the work, determined to succeed.

His comedy finished, he showed it to various friends, took advice from their counsels, and availed himself of such suggestions as he thought of use. The piece was then sent to the *Comédie Française*, and was accepted unanimously. He was anxious, however, to show his piece to another critic, a foreigner, like himself, famous throughout all Europe for the works he had published. That critic was Rousseau.

It was just at a period when Rousseau's singular mode of existence made him specially the object of public attention and curiosity. Goldoni knew that an unauthorised visit would be productive of no result. He wrote beforehand therefore, begging to be allowed an interview.

A very polite reply was sent to him. If he would give himself the trouble to mount four storeys high, *Hôtel Platrière*, *Rue Platrière*, J. J. Rousseau would be much pleased to see him. Goldoni went to the house indicated, and knocked at the door. It was opened by a woman neither young, pretty, nor engaging, he tells us. He asked if M. Rousseau was at home.

"He is and he is not," said the woman, whom Goldoni took for a housekeeper at the best; "what is your name?"

Goldoni told her.

"Oh!" said she—"you are expected. I will go and announce you to my husband."

The supposed housekeeper was no other than our old acquaintance of the "*Confessions*"—*Thérèse Le Vasseur*, the companion of Rousseau.

Goldoni entered the room. Rousseau, who was copying music, rose and welcomed him freely, a copy-book in his hand.

"See!" said he, "can anybody copy music like this? I defy a sheet to issue from the press as nice and as

exact as it goes from my hands. But come," he continued, "let us warm ourselves."

There was no fire. Rousseau asked for a log of wood. Thérèse brought it to him. Goldoni, naturally enough, felt his heart touched to see the man of genius copying music, and Thérèse acting as servant. He could not hide his surprise and pain. Rousseau, who seems to have divined what was passing in his mind, asked him the cause of his emotion. Goldoni was forced to explain.

"What!" said the philosopher gaily, "you pity me because I am occupied in copying? you believe that I should do better to compose books for people who do not know how to read, or articles for miserable journalists? You are in error. I am passionately fond of music. I copy excellent originals; it supplies me with the means of living, it amuses me, and I am satisfied. But you — with what are you occupied? You came to Paris to work for the Italian comedians. They are lazy. They do not want your pieces. Go away! Return to your native land; you are expected there—you are desired."

"Sir," said Goldoni, not a little startled, doubtless, by such a speech as this, "you are right. I ought to have quitted Paris after the neglect of the Italian comedians; but other views have kept me here. I have just composed a piece in French."

"You have composed a piece in French!" exclaimed Rousseau, with astonishment. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I am going to give it to the Comédie Française," replied Goldoni.

"You reproached me just now for losing my time," said Rousseau; "it is you who are losing it now."

"But my piece is received," put in Goldoni.

"Is it possible? Well! I am not astonished.

The comedians have no common sense. They receive, and they reject, at random. It is received, perhaps; but it will not be played. And if it be, so much the worse for you," was Rousseau's discouraging reply.

Goldoni, without doubt, was not much pleased. "How can you judge a piece you have never seen?" he modestly asked.

"I know the taste of the Italians, and that of the French," replied Rousseau; "there is a wide difference between the two; and permit me to say, at your age, it is not the time to commence composition in a foreign language."

"Your remark is just," said Goldoni; "but these difficulties may be overcome. I have confided my work to intelligent people—to people well-informed; and they appear pleased with it."

"They flatter you, they deceive you, you are their dupe," exclaimed Rousseau, as if wishing to close the conversation. "Let me see your piece; I am frank, I am straightforward, I will tell you the truth." And so the interview ended.

But Goldoni did not submit his piece to this ordeal. A few days after this interview, he met a literary friend who had just had relations with Rousseau which had not terminated pleasantly. This friend, according to his own account, pitying the distress of the man of genius, and wishing to give him a more comfortable home, had proposed to let him a very pretty suite of rooms, near the Tuileries gardens, at the same price as he paid in the Rue Platrière. Rousseau, perceiving his intentions, had refused, sharply declaring that he would not be deceived. Goldoni's friend then proposed to spend an evening with Rousseau, to hear the "Confessions," and to read in turn some of his own works. Rousseau

agreed, but only on condition that the evening should be passed at his own house, and that he should supply a frugal supper. He gave permission, however, to the other to furnish the single bottle of wine they would require, the wine of the Rue Platrière not being good. The benevolent gentleman, delighted with the chance of adding even in a small degree to Rousseau's comfort, sent at once half a dozen bottles of excellent wine. Rousseau was indignant at this breach of the contract. He would not rest until five of the bottles were sent away. He then read a portion of his "Confessions." His companion read in return, but was suddenly interrupted. Rousseau looked annoyed, and declared himself insulted. The other was laughing at him. He was caricaturing him. In vain Goldoni's friend declared himself innocent of any such intention. Rousseau would not listen to him; and the two parted in bitter anger, to renew their quarrel by a bitter correspondence.

Allowing for some little exaggeration in this story, it has an air of verity; and we cannot wonder that Goldoni deemed it prudent to go no more to the Hôtel Platrière. Perhaps he was right. The very title of the piece, "*Bourru Bienfaisant*," might, as he thought, offend Rousseau (we know, from the "Confessions," that Madame Le Vasseur called him a *bourru*,) while Géronte, the principal character, had many points of resemblance to Rousseau, which would doubtless have readily impressed themselves upon a mind as delicately sensitive as his appears to have been at that time. Goldoni's first interview with Rousseau was his last.

Goldoni once, and once alone, appears to have met Alfieri. It was in Paris, after an illness the former had had. The tragic writer seems to have held his



brother dramatist in good estimation. He tells us he was infinitely diverted with his writings when he read them at college. Years afterwards, as he was about to leave Sienna for London, he asked a friend for an introduction to the celebrated Goldoni, as he calls him ; and when they met, it was evidently with pleasure on both sides. Goldoni, at least, speaks highly of the other, and leads us to infer that the interview was a very agreeable one.

Goldoni appears to have cultivated the literary society of Paris, and to have been on good terms with many of the writers of the day. With Diderot he did not become intimate. Diderot had produced a play called "*Le Fils Naturel*," borrowed in great part from a piece by Goldoni. The resemblance was of course eagerly pointed out by Diderot's critics. Rousseau alludes to this, and to the effect it produced upon the author. "In addition to the storm excited against him by the *Encyclopædia*," says he, "Diderot experienced then a very violent one against his piece, which, in spite of the little history he has prefaced it with, he was accused of having taken entirely from Goldoni."

When Diderot's next piece, "*Le Père de Famille*," was produced, strangely enough, it bore the same name as another by the Italian author. There, however, all resemblance ceased. At least Goldoni himself thought so. But plagiarism once proved, or supposed to be proved, is sure to entail accusations of the same offence, even although undeservedly. Diderot was charged with again filching from Goldoni. In his letters describing the first performance of "*Le Père de Famille*," he says nothing of this. He describes the success of the piece as very great—more so than had ever before been known on a first night. He says that, as he came out of the theatre,

Duclos prophesied that three such pieces as that a year would kill tragedy, and that Marmontel wept with pleasure in embracing him. But nevertheless he was so piqued against Goldoni that he could not speak of him with ordinary respect; and it was not until a friend brought them together that he at all relaxed in his dislike to the Italian author.

The "*Bourru Bienfaisant*" in the mean time had passed through the various stages of preparation and rehearsal, and was represented for the first time at the Comédie Française on the 4th of November, 1771. On the morrow it was produced at Fontainebleau, on both occasions with considerable success. We find a notice of the first performance in a contemporary journal, "*Le Mercure de France*," a monthly magazine in the style of the "*Spectator*," containing essays, stories, poetry, music, short paragraphs of news, riddles, reviews, &c. "The comedy succeeded," says the "*Mercure*," after a tangled account of the plot, very different to those in the brilliant feuilletons of Théophile Gautier, or Paul de St. Victor, published now a-days. "It is well dialogued; the character of the '*Bourru Bienfaisant*' develops itself in good comic situations; the parts were very well rendered, above all that of the *Bourru* by M. Prévile, who perfectly seized the traits of character that he had to represent."

On the first night of performance, Goldoni was called before the curtain at the end of the piece. It was an honour he had never before received, the custom being unknown in Italy. Indeed we find that it had not been introduced many years into France. Its commencement only dates back to 1743. Voltaire's "*Merope*," produced in that year, was so successful

that the writer was demanded at the conclusion of the piece. The custom was from that time established. Either to receive the congratulations or the disapprobation of the audience, the author of every new piece was called for at its termination. Goldoni's embarrassment at the honour was equal to his delight. At Fontainebleau the king was so gratified that he gave the author one hundred and fifty louis. Goldoni's triumph was complete. The piece, thus fortunate, enjoyed something more than a mere transitory prosperity. We find, from the "Memoirs of Prévile," that the "*Bourru*" was reckoned one of his celebrated parts. It held possession of the stage many years.

Encouraged by this success, and stimulated by the solicitations of his friends, Goldoni made a second attempt of the same kind about two years afterwards. "*L'Avare Fastueux*" was the title of his second piece in French. It was produced for the first time at Fontainebleau; but the reception it met with was so unfavourable that Goldoni would not sanction its appearance on the stage of the Comédie Française. It was never played again. Changes in the Royal Family, which took place shortly afterwards, led Goldoni back again to Versailles in his capacity of Italian teacher. He gave lessons to Clotilde, sister of Louis XVI., previous to her marriage with the Prince of Piedmont, and afterwards to Madame Elisabeth, another sister of the same monarch. But he was growing old, and the air of Versailles did not suit him. He asked permission, therefore, to resign his post, and proposed as his successor the nephew he had brought from Venice. The proposal was accepted. Goldoni was specially recompensed with six thousand francs for the services

he had rendered, and an annual pension was still paid to him.

He had need of some such support to rest upon in his old days ; for his powers were beginning to fail him. He continued to write for the Venice stage, and during one season wrote again for the Italian theatre in Paris. But his pieces had not the life and vivacity of old, and failed to sustain his reputation. He had written more than a hundred and fifty dramatic productions ; was it not natural that age should at last hush his invention to sleep ? The final literary effort of his life was the writing of his "Memoirs." It occupied him three years ; and he did not complete it until he had attained his eightieth year ! The work, written in French, was published in 1787, in two volumes. As he wrote the concluding lines of that book the pen may be said to have dropped from his hand.

The closing days of his life were passed amid the exciting scenes of the French Revolution. That storm, which in its wild impetuosity swept so fiercely over the sea of corruption and abuse, did not, unfortunately, spare Goldoni's little bark. His pension was suppressed. It was but for a short time, however, and in the moment when men's eyes were too dazzled by the dawning light of liberty to see distinctly all around them. The young Republic could not grudge its aid to a poor old man, whose life had been one of steady labour and perseverance. His pension was quickly restored to him. But he had reached the period when it was no longer necessary. On the 7th of January, 1793, the very day on which his income was renewed, he breathed his last. He was eighty-six years of age. His widow received the arrears which had been destined for him, and was kept

secure from future want by a pension of twelve hundred francs a year, granted to her at the instance of Chenier, immediately after the death of Goldoni, by the National Convention.

Fortune had treated Goldoni not unkindly during life ; she did not utterly desert him at his last hour. .

## CHAP. XIV.

## THE ITALIAN STAGE.

WE have borne Goldoni company in a foreign land so long that we have almost lost sight of the country in which he took his birth, and of the stage which he revived. It is time now for us to return to these subjects. When Goldoni left Venice, the fall of his system seemed complete. Gozzi's pieces, increasing in success, gave birth to a crowd of imitations; and soon the Venice theatre was filled with nothing but fairy tales, enchantments, magicians, and the four masks in the midst of all with their improvised dialogue. Those who had praised Goldoni before scrupled not now to defame him. Even Gozzi admits that the criticisms passed upon him were most unjust. People went, as is usual when a favourite is deserted, from the extreme of praise to the extreme of condemnation. A hundred faults never seen in him before were now miraculously discovered. "Venice, the most inconstant city of the most inconstant country" (it is an Italian who speaks), turned her back completely upon the once popular playwright.

It was not all inconstancy, however, that produced this change. Writing in such abundance as did Goldoni, it was scarcely possible but that his works should begin at last to weary for a time the public ear. While his style had all its freshness, people admired; when it began to grow a little worn, they grew weary. Any



new comer at such a moment would have been received, perhaps, with considerable favour. But in the works of Gozzi there was an originality and inventive power that could scarcely fail to please. He took up subjects new to the Italian stage. Nursery stories, tales of enchantment, fairy legends, magician marvels. Immense scope was offered for scenic and mechanical display by such themes. The decorations and machinery introduced into these pieces would alone have attracted an audience to the theatre. There was, too, in the written parts of Gozzi's pieces a certain amount of poetic merit and earnestness. Gozzi completely entered into the spirit of the subject upon which he wrote. His magicians, enchanters, and fairies were thoroughly real persons. There was nothing of the burlesque about them, as in our extravaganzas. Indeed, so completely did poor Gozzi give himself up to the study of these subjects, that after a time his imagination was sensibly affected by them. He began to believe in an invisible world of spirits, and fancied himself under their dominion. His idea was that he had offended them by his plays, and that they were angry at having been placed upon the stage. He says that a mysterious voice whispered in his ear it was not right to put the king of the Genii upon the scene. A certain amount of politeness was due to every spirit. Form and density were necessary in order that this politeness should be rendered ; for how could we kiss the hands or embrace the knees of a Genius who had neither hands nor knees ! The spirits were so sensible of this difficulty, that, when they wished to obtain such marks of respect, they always took a human form. But in general they were satisfied with being properly venerated in the mind. How could Gozzi be said to have kept them in veneration, when he had placed them before

the eyes of the vulgar upon a public stage? This thought powerfully disturbed the wretched author. He relates with gravity, which may be ironical but which looks terribly like reality, the many annoyances to which he was subjected by the offended spirits. He was continually mistaken for people utterly dissimilar to him in size, name, and appearance. He never could go out without getting drenched to the skin, although five minutes after he returned home the sun was sure to burst out with malicious splendour. He was beaten by mistake for other people. Eight times out of ten while shaving he was interrupted by the arrival of visitors, and was compelled to meet them razor in hand—one cheek smooth, the other rough. Rascally lodgers hired his houses and paid no rent. Letters he had never seen were written in his name. The smallest and most necessary acts of his daily existence could not be performed without interruption and impediment!

Whether the spirits carried their revenge so far as to prejudice the mind of the Venetian public against Gozzi's pieces, we do not know; but it is certain that in a few years those pieces lost all their attraction. Critics attacked them as unmercifully as they had attacked Goldoni's. When Gozzi essayed to write fully developed plays, it was too late. He had lost his influence and power. A misunderstanding, that arose out of one of his pieces, ultimately led to the breaking up of Sacchi's company. The masks lingered on even until 1801; but Gozzi's pieces, many years before that date, had disappeared from the Venetian stage. So completely was he lost sight of, that the date and place of his death are unknown. His works seem to have sunk into equal oblivion. When a French tourist visited Venice in 1843, he inquired for them at several libraries. The booksellers

scarcely knew what he meant. At last, in a little shop, an old copy was drawn from the dust of forty years' accumulation, and the ten volumes were sold to him for the price of the paper! Gozzi was completely lost to view.

Goldoni's plays in the meantime had been completely reinstated upon the stage. Each year they increased in popularity. The new authors who arose adopted them for model. Albergati, Capacelli, Rossi, Giraud, Nota, and in the present day, Biletti-Bon Giacometti, and others, have all followed in the footsteps of Goldoni, and laboured, with varying talent and success, to sustain the character of the comic stage in Italy. The last writer seems determined to equal in quantity as well as quality the labours of his predecessor. He has already written seventy pieces, and will not rest content, it is said, until eighty more are added to their number.

We must seek the cause of Goldoni's sustained popularity more in the gaiety and liveliness of his works, perhaps, than in merit of a higher kind. The circumstances under which he wrote were not favourable to the development of thought or the creation of character. Throughout his life he was the salaried playwright of a company, paid to provide as much novelty as possible every season. I do not cast any slight upon Goldoni by these words. An author must be paid, like any other worker. He cannot feed upon air, although many authors are compelled to make the experiment; and very sorry fare they find it. But to be so closely under managerial rule as was Goldoni, was to be shut out from all opportunity of real creation. His contemporary has given us a vivid picture of the condition of the author thus situated. In Italy, he tells us, the worst of all trades is that of poet kept in pay by the comedians.

His works are pulled to pieces; he is cheated; if his powers begin to fail him, he is reproached with the sum he costs. If successful, he is forced on at a gallop, like a post-horse, until exhausted. There is no galley slave in chains, no porter groaning under his load, no ill-treated beast of burden, whose condition is not better than that of a salaried poet. The unhappy man becomes a machine, worn out in a few years, and then—useless; a stone to be cast out into the fields; a beggar to whom alms are given with more reluctance than to the souls of the dead, which nevertheless are not in want of clothes to screen them from the cold, or of food to preserve them from hunger.

True, in spite of his dependent state, and in the face of opposition, Goldoni carried out his dramatic system; but it was to the advantage, not the detriment, of the manager. If it had been otherwise, where would have been Goldoni's engagements? Who would have been willing to pay him for his pieces, if the public had not been willing to pay for them also? Not Signor Imer, depend upon it; and certainly not the ungenerous Medebac.

But perhaps we must seek in Goldoni himself, rather than in external causes, the reason of his want of elevation. That remarkable fertility of his was scarcely compatible with high creative power. What could be expected from a man who would write a five-act comedy in five days in time for it to be played on the sixth? Great works are not thus hurriedly born. An author who could dash off an act at a sitting, was not likely to labour for months, like Alfieri, polishing his diction, strengthening his conceptions, giving proportion, solidity, and harmony to the whole. One play a month appears to have been Goldoni's average rate

of production. One good play in the year would be as much as need be expected from any pen. Goldoni, we know, wrote sixteen pieces in one year. Did Shakspeare or Corneille write more than double that in their whole lives?

Goldoni has been called the Molière of Italy; but French critics are not generally disposed to allow him that title. "He is the Molière of Italy," indignantly said a journalist lately; "yes! in the same manner that M. Pradeau is the Lablache of the *Bouffes Parisiens*." The comparison is not obvious, perhaps, to every English reader. No matter. Any comparison between great merit and clever mediocrity will give the idea. This, perhaps, is a little harsh, but in intention rather than in truth. We must not lose sight of the state of the Italian stage when Goldoni came to it. Goldoni, in this respect, was even more unfavourably situated than Molière. The former came to a theatre almost utterly without life; the latter, to one just bursting into vigour. The theatre of the Hôtel de Bourgogne had been established more than a hundred years when Molière made his first essay in Paris. It had brought forward productions of home growth, imitations and translations of the best ancient authors; and Corneille had recently appeared to give its performances a still higher character. It was a school in which Molière could learn many lessons, and in which we have good authority for believing he did learn them. We ought not, then, to treat Goldoni too cavalierly. Whatever may be his power, he certainly may claim the merit of having founded modern Italy comedy, and of still being the head master in his school. Voltaire, we know, spoke of him with much respect. He calls him the celebrated Goldoni, and places his "Menteur" in by no means unfavourable com-



parison with that of Corneille ! But it may be doubted whether confusion rather than clearness is not introduced into the subject by placing in any way the names of Molière and Goldoni together. If comparisons must be made, would it not be better to go altogether in another direction, and to say that M. Scribe is the Goldoni of France ? The literary merit of the Italian dramatist will be made more apparent, perhaps, by this arrangement of simile.

There is very little of the philosophical or the thoughtful in the pieces of Goldoni. They are principally remarkable for their ease and sprightliness, and for the fidelity with which surface traits of society are sketched. He drew from all classes, from all ranks, with equal ability. Many of his pictures would be thought, perhaps, strangely fanciful and untrue upon the English stage. They could scarcely be faithful portrayals of Italian manners were it not so. The atmosphere of the South is in no way our atmosphere. Human nature, we know, is the same everywhere. Manners and the domestic relations of life change in every country. England and Italy present many points of contrast. One illustration is enough. We try to get all our love-making over before marriage. In Italy it takes place after. But then, unfortunately, it is not husband and wife who bill and coo, which the most virtuous of us would not condemn, but which on the contrary we should hail as a great improvement upon the present system ; it is wife and lover who give themselves up to those sweet delights. This is a fashion we do not want in England. We are moderately happy in our own way ; and depend upon it that is better than being immoderately happy in any other. Goldoni's pieces sometimes show the influence of this system, although they do not directly deal with it. Some of



his young ladies would be thought even more seraphic than the most meek of English heroines. They gladly marry any old and disagreeable suitor that Pantalone may be pleased to give them. But the reason is obvious. Marriage, instead of depriving them of any liberty, throws down all the barriers of restraint. Once surely united to a husband, they begin to think of love and pleasure. Oh, the charms of such a wedded state!

Despite of the comic writers who have since arisen, some with higher talents than Goldoni, the Italians still cling with fondness to the old master. His works are incessantly played in all the theatres. They are the stock pieces of the stage, never failing to amuse even when more modern productions will not. Everywhere he is in high favour. If we do not share to the fullest extent this admiration, we can at least sympathise with it, and with the exaggeration of enthusiasm which still causes the Italians to speak of him, as the Great Goldoni.



## ALFIERI AND GOLDONI.

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### CONCLUDING REMARKS.

ALFIERI and Goldoni, like most authors who attain celebrity, have been accused of imitating or borrowing from other writers. In the case of Alfieri the charge has been already met. His imitations are the mere resemblances which link genius to genius without interfering with the independent manifestations of either. Unless an author should discover for himself a new language, a new literature, and a new material world, from which to draw his illustrations and incidents, it is scarcely possible that he will avoid being, more or less, like some predecessor or contemporary. But if the impress of an individual mind be left upon all he does; if the ideas that pass through his brain—no matter how those ideas are suggested—take new form in the transition; if they enter, bare and rough as the stone that issues from the quarry, and come forth hewn into harmony, the labour by which this change is brought about may well give him who labours the claim to be regarded as an original and creative worker.

If the charge against Alfieri can be thus easily dismissed, it is not so perhaps with that against Goldoni.

His pen was more prolific than that of his brother dramatist. Writing as he did, he could scarcely have avoided contracting literary debts, of larger or smaller amount, with other writers. In the hurried chase after ideas in which he was constantly engaged, it was not likely that he could at all times be very particular as to what ground he traversed. Doubtless he oftentimes laid his hand on the first ideas he could meet, and they suffered more or less of change according to their adaptability to the purpose for which he required them. It says something for Goldoni, however, that the French, who complain the most of his borrowings, do not fail to admit that they themselves are under many obligations to him. Perhaps, therefore, if all accounts were made up, the balance might be found to lean more towards originality than otherwise.

This question of borrowing or adapting from the works of others, has an importance in the present day, affecting as it does interests that touch us more nearly than do those of Italian comedy. I may perhaps be allowed, therefore, to extend the range of my observations to our own time and our own stage, and to offer a few remarks upon the present state of the dramatic art amongst us.

If a French gentleman with a good knowledge of English were to visit London just now, he would no doubt be astonished to find, that in the city of fog and humidity in which he had arrived, full of so many odd and unfamiliar objects, so many sullen and dismal streets, so many gaunt and grimy houses, so much indecent bustle and unfeeling haste,—he would be astonished, I say, to find that in the midst of all this strangeness there would yet be something to recal his own dear Paris to his mind, and to transport him back again, in

imagination, to the banks of the Seine. If he visited almost any one of our theatres, it would be there that these fond memories would be awakened. He would see at one house some elegant comedietta he had admired half a score of times, perhaps, at the Gymnase; he would see at another, some touching little piece that more than once had brought tears into his eyes as he sat in the stalls of the Français; at a third he would see, through recollections that even now seem shaken by strong laughter, some whimsical farce in which Hyacinthe or Ravel had delighted the not overfastidious frequenters of the Palais Royal. We may judge with what surprise and gratification he would look upon these old friends in a new dress; and with what interest he would listen to every word that fell from the actor's lips. His opinion of England would rise immediately. He would think us the most judicious nation in the world to come to Paris for our dramatic ideas, and to adopt them so thoroughly. He would see in such conduct, nothing but a delicate homage to the Wit and Inventive faculty of France, and from that moment would become prouder than ever of the land which had given him birth.

But the first sensations of delight wearing away, he would begin, perhaps, to have other feelings. He would look at the subject from a new point of view. He would say, perchance, "I have been witnessing the representation of works by my fellow-countrymen translated into English; but where are the names of my fellow-countrymen? Why are they not printed in bold and legible letters upon the playbill?" Looking closer, he would find a good sturdy unpronounceable English name placed where those he sought should have been. We

may imagine the change which would then come over his mind.

“*Mon Dieu !*” he would doubtless exclaim, “what is this? Do my eyes deceive me? Where then is your English honesty and high principle which you parade in the eyes of all the world? What! you come to our stage; you carry off all its best pieces; you translate them into your own barbarous tongue, and you give no credit, no honour, to the authors who have written these pieces! You do not recognise them in any way, but put your own literary men forward as authors, when they are merely skilful translators! It is frightful, it is shameful, it is perfidious!” And our imaginary French acquaintance would cease, doubtless, from that evening, to visit the London theatres; and if of a literary turn, would write home to some French journal a long exciting account of our dishonesty, and call upon the dramatic authors of France to cry aloud for justice against all and everyone concerned in the theatrical matters of the English capital.

I hope I shall not be thought an enemy to my country or its stage, if I say that I should feel inclined to join most heartily in the cries of this French gentleman, were he to utter them; nay, more, that I should not be unwilling to assist him in his search after the means of reforming this abuse. It appears to me that the question of translation from the French, or “adaptation,” as it is daintily called, is of an importance not usually accorded to it, and that it should be regarded from a point of view from which I do not remember to have ever seen it looked upon. Hitherto, it has almost invariably been the custom, when this question has been discussed, to associate it with others that tend to obscure the main point to be considered. It has been usual to



talk of this subject in connexion with the decline of the poetic drama, and to attribute that decline to the practice which has so long prevailed of borrowing plays from our neighbours. This undoubtedly is a part of the subject, and a very important part; but there is another even more important still—I mean the question of literary dishonesty involved in these borrowings.

In a previous page I have described the process by which a French piece becomes English; but the satirical colouring given, or intended to be given, to that description, may appear to surround the whole with an exaggerated atmosphere. Let us now, therefore, look at the process with clear and impartial vision, and endeavour to ascertain, by a comparison of the original works with their English representatives, exactly the amount of resemblance between the one and the other.

The process which is called “adaptation,” but which in truth is often only free translation, consists, as I have said, in changing French names and scenes into English; altering local allusions, and in re-casting jokes or witticisms, that from the difference in the genius of the two languages are untranslatable. Let us take a few examples of the amount of Adaptation displayed in effecting the second of these changes; for of the first, by which Chamouillet becomes Mr. Sowerby, or Antonio Malaquez, Mr. Stanley Jones, and so on, it is not, I suppose, necessary to speak.

In a little Palais Royal piece I have before me (“Monsieur Va au Cercle”), one of the characters, exclaims: *“Des gants jaunes . . . . des gants ‘Jouvin’ à trois francs cinquante . . . . Moi qui me prive et n’achète que des gants ‘Tour de Nesle’ à vingt-neuf sous.”*

This in the English version is thus changed:—

“Gloves! yellow gloves, too! Houbigant’s. The very

best quality ; positively four and sixpence a pair, at the very least, while I am obliged to content myself with shilling ones from Shoolbred's ! ”

Now what is this but an exact representation in English of the *idea* expressed in French ? The *Tour de Nesle* is a cheap Paris glove shop. Shoolbred's a similar London establishment. What is there here but the free translation of detail necessitated by a change of scene ? Take another example from the same piece.

“ *Tiens !* ” exclaims the person who has just commented upon the yellow gloves — “ *je m'étais endormie en lisant le Mousquetaire.* ”

It is not every London play-goer, perhaps, who knows that *le Mousquetaire* is the Paris daily journal of M. Alexandre Dumas, and if they knew it they would not think it a publication that an English lady living in London would be likely to read. Accordingly, the translator says, perhaps in order to inflict some frightful vengeance upon Mr. Thackeray, perhaps to compliment him, — for the remark is open to two directly opposite interpretations, — “ Bless me, I've fallen asleep with ‘Pendennis’ in my hand ! ”

What Adaptation there is in this ! Why is not our breath taken away by its cleverness ?

Another example. In a celebrated piece, “Mercadet,” produced at the Gymnase about five years since, one of the characters says — “ *Allez aux Champs Elysées, achetez une chaise de poste bien crottée,* ” &c. Unfortunately we have no Champs Elysées, so it would be useless to refer anybody in London, who wanted a carriage in all haste, to that delightful thoroughfare. What does the English “adaptor” do in this difficult emergency ? Why, like a man thoroughly learned in London localities, he directs his friend to “Long Acre” for the

travelling carriage required. These are samples of the amount of Change brought about in adapting French pieces to the English stage. With one more I finish these illustrations.

“*Ce monaco*,” says one of the dramatis personæ in the “*Histoire d’un Sou*,” a comedy in one act, by Messrs. Clairville and Lambert-Thiboust, “*et que n’importe ce monaco ? Ce monaco, je le bénis ; si j’étais contrôleur de la Monnaie, Madame, je supprimerais à l’instant même tous les sous et tous les centimes. Je voudrais que vous fussiez insolvable. Je serais là toujours à vous crier, comme les petits ramoneurs, un petit sou, ma bonne dame.*”

Every frequenter of the Haymarket theatre cannot be supposed to remember what Saint Simon, with more force than delicacy, says of Monaco, namely, that it is “a rock from the middle of which we might, so to speak, spit beyond its narrow limits.” But a French audience remember this, or at least they know that a Monaco copper coin may be regarded as the representative of littleness itself in connexion with money. Let us see now what changes this speech undergoes in order to assume an English form.

“Do you imagine, Madam, that I am really anxious about a *halfpenny*? No, Madam, no. If I were the master of the Mint I would call in all the old halfpennies; and then every day I would call upon you, and looking up to that angelic countenance with my solitary sou in my hand, I would say, like the lowliest Lascar, ‘Please, Madam, give me a halfpenny.’”

Now, allowing all credit to the English “adaptor” for the clever and really witty manner in which his version is written, what is that version after all but a free-spirited

rendering of the original, for which, as an adaptation, all praise is due. But then the adaptor, on the strength of these and other alterations, calls himself "author" of the piece. His name at least is on the title page, and there is not the most distant allusion to Messieurs Clairville and Lambert-Thiboust, or the slightest intimation that the English writer is in any way indebted to them for his work. Is this fair? Is it honest? Would such "adaptation" be permitted in any other department of literature?

It is not as though the English pieces differed in any striking and important points from the French. It is not as though new incidents were introduced, a new rendering given to the whole, or as though the *idea* rather than the *details* of the piece were used. Putting aside a few unimportant alterations besides those already named, scene mostly succeeds scene, incident follows incident, effect follows effect, precisely as in the original work. What the leading character says and does in one piece he says and does in the other; he is surrounded by the same people; they all move onwards towards the same point; they reach it in the same manner, and the curtain falls at the end on the same tableau.

I will not deny that there is more alteration in some pieces than in others, as there are some pieces which are much more freely rendered into English than others. But what is at best the sum total of this alteration? Let us see and judge for ourselves.

To commence then: the dialogue is generally curtailed; French conversation on the stage often showing an utter disbelief in the exhaustibility of human patience. Secondly, little details, such as I have already alluded to, are added to furnish the London version with a London

aspect ; and thirdly, the comic characters are altered in order to fit them more completely to the English comedians who are to play them ; or it may be that in some instances comic characters are altogether interpolated. When alteration takes place, it is frequently of a kind accommodated to the physical or other peculiarities of the actor. For instance, M. Piston of the Paris stage is inclined to be short and thin ; whereas Mr. Kecley of the London stage is, it is well known, inclined to be short and thick. Therefore when an opportunity occurs for impressing this latter fact upon the minds of the English audience we may be sure it is not lost sight of.

If the French comedian, in reply to a sneer at his personal appearance, replies, in the bad French suited to the character he is assuming : *Je suis peut-être pas beau z'homme*, that remark comes from the English comedian thus expanded : " Well, what I want in height I have in breadth. Lord ! if I was pulled out I should be six feet high." Had not the physical conformation of the English actor justified this change, of course it would never have been made. Its value, and the value of some dozen similar changes scattered through a three act piece are not, I think it will be admitted, sufficiently important to justify an English writer in calling the work his own, the main idea of that work, its incidents, its arrangement, and the bulk of its dialogue being taken from a French author.

As an instance of the closeness with which the French piece is often followed, let me give a scene as it appears in the two languages.

Here is an extract from a *Comedie-Vaudeville* in three acts, by Messrs. Bayard and Biéville, called "Un Fils de Famille."

## SCENE VII.

ARMAND, EMMELINE.

(*Armand à part, entrant et s'asseyant sur une table à droite.*)

*Armand.*— Je n'ai jamais vu de physionomie plus engageante !

*Emmeline (de même.)*— Si j'osais le faire causer ! . . . je saurais peut-être. (*Elle fait mine de rentrer à l'auberge.*)

*Arm. (toussant.)*— Hum !

*Em.*— Ah, j'ai eu peur !

*Arm.*— Excusez, c'est que les camarades qui vous pressaient vivement tout à l'heure, ma belle enfant, ont dû vous donner une si mauvaise opinion de la galanterie militaire.

*Em.*— Que vous voudriez m'en donner une meilleure.

*Arm.*— Dame ! par esprit de corps. . . . Après cela vous me direz peut-être que ce ne sont pas ces lanciers-là que vous espériez voir ici.

*Em.*— Ni ceux-là, ni d'autres.

*Arm.*— Bah ! et ce beau cavalier qui a traversé votre commune ? (*Elle se détourne en souriant.*) Ce n'est pas lui qui vous a donné rendezvous ?

*Em.*— Ah seigneur Dieu ! Non ! Je ne pourrais tant seulement pas le reconnaître ; je n'ai vu que son uniforme.

*Ar.*— Vrai ! Ce n'est pas pour lui que vous êtes venue à la ville ?

*Em.*— (*s'asseyant sur le banc à gauche.*) Mais non ! Par exemple ! en voila une idée !

*Ar.*— Pourquoi donc ? (*Il se lève et s'approche du banc.*)

*Em.*— Eh bien ! c'était pour la revue ; ça doit être si



joli ! tout le régiment à cheval. Et puis le colonel — car je suis sûre qu'il est bien, votre colonel ? Hein ! Comme vous me regardez !

*Ar.*—(*s'approchant.*) Tiens ! il y a de quoi ! Mais comment se fait-il que moi, qui parcours tous les bals champêtres a trois lieues à la ronde je ne vous aie jamais rencontrée ?

*Em.*—Bah ! C'est que vous n'avez pas fait attention. . . . il y en a tant d'autres . . . et puis il est jeune ?

*Ar.*—Jeune—qui cela ?

*Em.*—Eh bien ! lui, votre colonel.

*Ar.*—(*s'asseyant près d'elle.*) Ah mon colonel ! oui, oui . . . et peut on savoir le nom de l'heureuse commune qui vous possède ?

*Em.*—Que vous importe.

*Ar.*—C'est que j'imagine que cette commune-là va devenir ma promenade favorite.

*Em.*—C'est drôle ! vous n'avez pas l'air de l'aimer.

*Ar.*—Votre commune ?

*Em.*—Non ! votre colonel.

*Ar.*—Ah ça mais que diable ! qu'avez-vous donc à me parler toujours de mon colonel ?

*Em.*—Moi ? c'est que ça doit être beau, un colonel avec des épaulettes sur un cheval qui caracole !

[And so on.]

Now let me give an extract, from a piece in English, which I think will bear a strong resemblance to the above. Armand is changed into Albert, and Emmeline into Adeline.

*Albert.*—(*entering through the gate and seating himself on a table : aside.*) I never beheld a more engaging physiognomy.

[*She pretends to enter the inn.*]

*Alb.*—(*coughing loudly.*) Hem !

*Ade.*—Oh how you frightened me !

*Alb.*—I beg ten thousand pardons. The fact is, that the rough conduct of my comrades to you just now, my charming fair one, has impressed you with a very sorry opinion of military gallantry.

*Ade.*—Which you would reverse ?

*Alb.*—For the honour of the regiment. Now you will tell me, perhaps, that these are not the Lancers you hoped to see.

*Ade.*—Neither these, nor any others *particular*.

*Alb.*—And this model centaur. (*She turns away smiling.*) It is not he who has appointed to meet you here ?

*Ade.*—Goodness gracious ! no. I should not know him from Adam if I met him. I only saw his uniform.

Here follows a joke for which the English translator evidently is not indebted to the French author. I print it in capitals to distinguish it from the rest.

*Alb.*—(*aside.*) AND ADAM'S WAS THE BUFFS. Nor it was not for him (*sic.*) that you visited this city ?

*Ade.*—(*seating herself on the form.*) No, certainly not. Dear me, what a strange idea.

*Alb.*—Why strange ? (*rising and going towards her.*)

*Ade.*—Why because it is. There's a woman's reason for you. I only came to see the review ; it must be such a pretty sight all the regiment on horseback ! And then the colonel. I'm sure your colonel must be a fine fellow — is he not ? Law ! how you stare at me !

*Alb.*—(*approaching her.*) Hem ! There's a certain something ! How is it that I, who frequent all the *bals champêtres* for three leagues round, have never encountered you ?

*Ade.*—Bah! because you had no eyes for me. There are so many others. Is he young?

*Alb.*—Young, who?

*Ade.*—Your colonel.

*Alb.*—(*seating himself beside her—she makes room for him.*) Ah, my colonel. Yes, yes. And may I know the happy commune which possesses you?

*Ade.*—What matters it to you?

*Alb.*—Because I begin to suspect that this commune will become my favourite promenade.

*Ade.*—How droll! I don't think there's much love between you.

*Alb.*—Between me and your commune?

*Ade.*—No, between you and your colonel.

*Alb.*—Oh! what the devil——

*Ade.*—Oh, don't talk of him, or he may appear.

*Alb.*—Ha! ha! the devil?

*Ade.*—No, your colonel.

*Alb.*—What the——

*Ade.*—Hush!

*Alb.*—Oh! (*rising partly—the form tips a little.*)

*Ade.*—Oh!

*Alb.*—A thousand pardons.

*Ade.*—There, sit still. And now tell me about your colonel.

*Alb.*—Always that infernal colonel! Why can you talk of nothing else but my colonel?

*Ade.*—I—because he must be something out of the common—a colonel—with his epaulettes, on a charger that gracefully caracoles!

Such is the English version, and yet in despite of Messrs. Bayard and Biéville, who surely can lay almost as much claim to the English dialogue cited above as to

the French, their names are never once mentioned in connexion with the piece. An English writer, a member of the Dramatic Authors' Society, unhesitatingly puts his name on the title-page, and no doubt would visit with the Law's pains and penalties any miserable manager who played the piece without handing over the regular author's dues.

I think there is something more than a question of "legitimacy" or "nationality" involved here. Literary morality itself is concerned. If we thus readily seize upon the works of foreign writers and translate them into our own language, only introducing a new line or a new idea here and there, surely those foreign authors should at least have some share in the fame and the profit of their productions. Even if we deem that our alterations are sufficient to render the English work so dissimilar to the French that the law does not consider the one a *translation* of the other; even if we think thus (and I am by no means sure that the law would entertain a similar opinion) surely we ought at least to acknowledge that we are the "adaptors," not the authors, of the work. On the title-page of a piece in English that I have before me, I see in clear and conspicuous type, "Adapted from the French Vaudeville 'Un Service à Blanchard.'" This is straightforward; this is honest; but why is not the same system followed in every case. Why do we not see upon the title-page of "Tit for Tat" that it is adapted from the *Comedie-Vaudeville*, "Les Maris me font toujours rire;" and upon that of "How stout you're getting," that it is from the French piece entitled "Un Mari qui prend du ventre." And yet, perhaps, the omission is but of little moment, for the title of "adaptor" would very often be as difficult to sustain as that of "author." In numberless cases

“translator” is the proper word, and translator should be used.

What would be said if the same system prevailed in any other department of literature? Suppose I were to take Georges Sand’s charming and touching story “François le Champi” (which Mr. Thackeray would seem to have been so inspired by when he conceived the plot of his “Esmond”), suppose I were to call *Madelienne* the miller’s wife, Martha; *François*, Frank, and so on; that I were to shift the scene from a province of France, to Devonshire or Cornwall; that I were to expunge such allusions and details as would not harmonise with English manners and English scenery, supplying their place by others more appropriate, or omitting them altogether; suppose I were to call the work “Frank the Cast-away,” or by some such title, and publish it as my own. Would not every English critic denounce me? Would they not all cry shame upon me for defrauding Madame Sand of her literary property? Would not every journal expose my delinquency; warn their readers against my book, and stop its sale? Assuredly! And yet if I committed exactly the same offence upon the stage, if I cobbled and patched up a French play instead of a French novel, my misdemeanour would pass unnoticed. Plenty of critics would be found to say where I had purloined my ideas, but not one to denounce me to justice.

What a deplorable intellectual position we should soon be in, if all our literature was obtained in the same way as is that of the stage! If our books of travel, our memoirs, our scientific essays, our novels, were French works in an English dress, what a literary masquerade our ideas would move in! What a poor decrepid thing the English Imagination would become, self-deprived of every opportunity of exercising its powers! With all our

thinking done for us, we should be as incapable of intellectual exertion, as a nation which puts out its fighting is of repelling a foreign foe. England, mentally, would become as dead as Nineveh.

Managers I know have said, and doubtless continue to say, that they are forced to fly to French sources for their dramatic productions, there being no longer any English authors capable of writing for the stage. It seems a strange charge this against the intellect of the nation. We must have sadly fallen off to deserve so unfavourable an accusation. The country which has given birth to the greatest dramatist the world ever saw, and which numbers on its dramatic muster-roll such names as Ben Jonson, Marston, Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Congreve, Goldsmith, Sheridan, not to mention many others associated with the history of the stage in more recent years—that country must have lost much of its ancient talent. Instead of being one of the rich merchant princes of mind, it must have become a poor, broken-down, needy bankrupt, living upon the reminiscences of former affluence. I cannot quite make up my mind that it has suffered this degradation.

But admitting for the sake of argument that the charge is correct, may we not inquire whether managers do as much as they have the power to do, in order to bring about a happier state of things? How is a young author treated, who sends a piece to a London theatre? His production is placed among a heap of other manuscripts; dust steadily accumulates upon it, or mould grows upon its pages. If, after waiting many months, and out of patience and exasperated, he asks for his work, a search is made for it. Should an easy search be successful, the manuscript in due time reaches its



writer's hands, without apology, without remark. If unsuccessful, those hands may stretch themselves out in vain; they will never receive sheet or page of the missing work.

Lest it should be thought that I am speaking without bounds, let me relate an instance (one of many which have come under my own observation) of the treatment received by a young author, in this case a friend of mine, who some time since forwarded a piece to one of the London theatres.

My friend had been, during the war, to the Crimea, had passed over the battle-field, and visited all the places which had become famous. While in the midst of these stirring scenes, he conceived the notion of embodying some of the ideas suggested by what he saw, in a dramatic form. That my friend was not a very ambitious man, may be judged of by the fact that he wrote his piece in only one act. Upon returning to London he sent this modest production to one of the theatres; pointed out that it dealt with a subject of popular interest, and begged that it might be examined with all convenient rapidity, as that interest would probably diminish with the first indications of Peace. This was in the month of September, 1855. Weeks rolled on. People began to think less and less of the war every day. They were growing weary of battle, suffering, and bloodshed. My friend wrote for the return of his piece. No answer was given him. He wrote again. Still no answer. Peace came, and the war was a thing of the past; the Crimea a page in history. My friend's piece had no longer a claim upon the popular ear. He thought, however, that it might be remodelled, and again made available for the purposes of the scene. Having left London and become a neighbour of mine in Paris, he

could not himself call at the theatre, and, to write, he had found was useless. He deputed a friend, therefore, to inquire for the piece. His deputy undertook the mission. Not one call, but some half dozen calls, did he make, but all were of no effect. The manager was very sorry, but he had mislaid the little drama; he would look for it, it should be left out by the following Tuesday. The Tuesday came, as all Tuesdays will come, but not the piece with it. It had not been discovered, but it should be sent to any address named; and so on. To conclude, my friend has not yet received his piece, has long ceased all inquiry for it, and consoles himself for his loss as he best may.

Now, let me ask whether a young writer in any other department of literature is thus scurvily treated. I do not believe there is a publisher in London, who, upon receiving a manuscript, even from a totally unknown author, would not direct some amount of attention to it, and in the course of from one to three months, decide whether to accept or reject the work. I do not mean to say that even publishers have not a few oddities in their treatment of young authors, but at least they take care of the manuscripts submitted to them, and surrender them when asked for. But a play once within the walls of a theatre, it would seem as though all trace of it were for ever afterwards lost. It has been sucked down into a maelstrom of Neglect, and the eddies of after diligence cannot bring it up again to the surface.

I believe it has become the general custom among managers, never to read a piece submitted to them by an unknown writer. I was in conversation once with the daughter of one of our London managers, and she assured me that every season her father received a pile of manuscript pieces as high as herself. I asked her if

the pieces were ever looked at. "Oh, yes," was the reply. "We glance at the first few pages of the most legible, but they are always the same, all rubbish alike; and so we send them away, or write to the authors to fetch them."

Of course a hurried glance at the first few pages of a work, perhaps in five acts, is a very satisfactory and conclusive manner of ascertaining the merit of the whole; but it is something to receive even this amount of attention.

It seems to me that, regarded from almost any point of view, the subject upon which I am treating is of the utmost importance. How, for instance, can we hope to have a high-class drama when we lack the stepping-stones by which it is to be reached? For few will deny that in the drama, as in every other art, we must commence by modest efforts if we would rise to greatness. What writer, unless more than usually gifted or more than usually vain, begins with three volumes? Does he not rather begin on a much more humble scale, — a short tale, an essay, a stanza, — and by means of these efforts guide his steps to higher and more laborious works? And this gradual process is essentially necessary in the drama. There is so much of what may be called mechanism, in the construction of a good acting piece, that, unless a man be born with a natural capacity for writing plays in five acts, he must study the workings of the stage itself, and make himself intimate with even its most insignificant details, before he can hope to succeed. Do we not see illustrations of the want of this necessary knowledge every day? Are not five-act plays continually written utterly without that well-ordered arrangement of scene and act, without which no piece can be successful in representation? Critics often say of such

productions that they are very good, but fit only for the closet. This, to my mind, is the most perfect condemnation. It is like saying a novel is excellent, but unreadable. A play is, or should be, something to be represented. If it will not admit of representation, it fails in its most essential quality, and falls as far short of its intention as does a story, meant to be interesting, but which is only provocative of slumber.

Is it not necessary, then, that the young dramatist should have, what the young novelist has, — opportunity for entering upon the lowest step of his art, and of progressively working his way to the highest? The beginner in fiction can send his first short sketch to a magazine. Where is the first short sketch of a young dramatist to find admission?

A result of the present system of "adaptation," which tends to keep all new talent from the stage, is the facility with which pieces are produced by the established dramatist. When Shadwell seized upon "*L'Avare*" and adapted it to the stage of his day, long before Fielding's "*Miser*" had sprung from the same source, he said: "I believe I may advance without vanity" (I am quoting Shadwell through M. Taschereau), "that Molière has lost nothing in my hands. No French piece has ever been handled by one of our poets, however poor he may have been, without being improved. It is not from want of invention or want of wit that we borrow from the French; but it is from idleness: it is also from idleness that I have made use of Molière."

I suppose some of our rapid adapters would feel very much inclined to echo these words. No doubt it is from idleness that they make use of French pieces. It is so easy to sit down, and, with ideas as ready to the mind as pen, ink, and paper are to the hand, to dash off an act,

while the poor simpleton who wishes to be original would not perhaps have found a single thought capable of being worked into form! Such light labour can well afford to claim but a light recompense. But would the same recompense requite the man who, perhaps, had laboured for days, where the other had laboured for hours? I have a three-act drama in English before me. The "author" is candid enough to admit, in a little note on the back of the title-page, that the piece is an "adaptation" from the French. But he adds: "This version was written in thirteen hours!" Three acts in thirteen hours! A rapid copyist could barely do more than transcribe the piece in that time. We may judge then to what extent the piece is "adapted." The usual changes are made in unimportant details, and some twenty or thirty lines are added at the end. With these exceptions, the piece is nothing more or less than a direct translation — a translation of ability I admit, whether the almost incredibly short space of time in which it was performed be regarded or not.

What writer, depending simply upon his own inventive powers, could compete with such rapid work as this? It would be impossible. He must go to the wall; become mental bankrupt; while his more successful rival, trading on a capital of borrowed ideas, would continue to wear the purple and fine linen of reputation, and to enjoy the more solid and substantial realities of success.

I hope it will be seen that, in offering the above remarks, I direct my observations against a system rather than against individuals. The writers of the present day did not introduce that system (we must go back to the infancy of the stage to find its commencement), and they are not therefore wholly responsible for its faults. I am sufficiently national to believe that we

possess authors who have dramatic ability that would do honour to any stage. The wit and spirit with which many a French piece is rendered into English are alone proofs of this. I only deplore that that wit and spirit are not more worthily employed.

If we have authors, then, what is wanting in order that we should have a stage? Are there not abundance of subjects which invite the dramatist to make use of them? Are not the events which take place in our own day and in our own country as highly dramatic, as full of interest, as the events which have taken place in any age and in any country? I do not believe in specially golden ages or poetic ages. There is just as much poetry, romance, and human emotion in the events of our daily life, even of our daily commercial life, as in the events which illustrate the lives of wandering knights-errant, Crusaders, Bards, ancient warriors, and world-renowned heroes. As Emerson says: "I have no expectation that any man will read history aright, who thinks that what was done in a remote age by men whose names have resounded far, has any deeper sense than what he is doing to-day." Wherever human life is, with all its wondrous and complicated incidents of passion and feeling, there is poetry; there, the real and great drama of human existence is being played.

Almost from the first moment we begin to read, we imbibe the idea that there is no poetry out of ancient castles, glittering palaces, halls of state, and grand assemblies — that there is no elevated or delicate sentiment except among tearful maidens in silk and satin; sighing knights in armour, dreamy pages, courtly chevaliers, and magnificent monarchs! Our eyes are blinded by the dust of time. When we re-open them we see everything through a cloud! Poets of all degree



have perhaps much to answer for, for thus leading the mind astray.

Let us look around us, and among ourselves. Our own day has its incidents of tragedy, comedy, and farce, and in a hundred forms, that in other and earlier days were unknown, — incidents that have grown with our growth, and sprung out of the changes brought about by time. Look at the daily newspaper! What histories are written there! What sad stories of guilt and shame! What touching narratives of want and misery! What stirring records of adventure, of bravery, of devotion, of heroism! Every page seems to throb with life. In a single copy of the "Times" there are themes for the poet, the playwright, and the novelist; themes that renew themselves each day, and that are inexhaustible. We need not fear, then, any want of subjects for our stage. Our difficulty will be in the affluence, rather than in the poverty of the materials at our command.

Can it be said that there is any lack of able interpreters for the creations of the dramatist? People will tell us that we have no actors now, as our fathers, our grandfathers, and our great grandfathers were told before us. Well! perhaps we have no actors who resemble the celebrities of a past age. For originality's sake it is better, I think, that they do not. At any rate, we have actors whom we admire and appreciate; whom we feel to be possessed of that wondrous power which embodies the inmost thoughts and fancies of the author. If they are not so good as the performers of another generation, we of the present generation are at least spared the contrast, for we know only those who are our contemporaries. It would be useless to complain of a loss it is impossible for us to feel. If, too, we have not so many great actors as formerly adorned the stage, at least we

have enough for our purposes. When did a London theatre ever close its doors because actors could not be found? Doors have been closed because an audience was vainly sought for, but never, that am I aware of, in the other case.

Have we not, in tragedy, an actor whose masterly delineations and whose courageous enterprise have secured a home to our poetic drama, when every other dramatic home has been pitilessly forbidden it? Do we not see in the performances of Phelps nearly all the qualities that it is possible to unite in a tragic actor?—great feeling, passion, high poetic appreciation, and good physical capacity? There may have been “properer men” in stature, colour of hair, and such like recommendations; there can have been few with a wider grasp of high impersonating power. If we have no Mrs. Siddons to bear him company, we have at least many actresses whose talents are not insignificant,—Miss Cushman, who is of the same stock as ourselves, and who has almost become naturalised amongst us; Miss Helen Faucit; Miss Vandenhoff; Miss Glyn, and others.

Then, in comedy, have we not Keeley with his rich and stolid humour; Buckstone with his sunny and warm-hearted drollery; Wright with his strong whimsicality; Compton with his dry, hard manner; Charles Matthews with his wonderful versatility, sprightliness, and unflagging animation; Leigh Murray with his gentlemanly ease and coolness; Webster so finished and so elaborate; Mrs. Keeley overflowing with buoyant animal spirits, and full of daring energy and power; Mrs. Stirling with her charming natural manner, and her true comedy appreciation. Then in that delicate sister art, which is neither comedy nor tragedy, but a link connecting the two, are there not Robson and Wigan, melting us to tears one

moment, rousing us to laughter the next. And even as I write these lines other actors, such as Mr. Dillon and Mr. Toole, are dawning upon the horizon of popular favour, and will doubtless in due time reach its meridian.

There seems no reason, then, why we should not have a stage — why we should not eat at our own feast, instead of feeding upon the broken victuals of the French drama. Much as the spread of popular literature may have influenced public taste, diverting it from theatrical scenes to the almost equally dramatic scenes of the newspaper and the novel, there are still many lovers of the stage who continue to visit our theatres. The cheap book and the cheap journal have done much, doubtless, in the present day, to draw off attention from the stage. They have to some extent supplied its place, but they never will utterly supersede it. The love for dramatic representation cannot wholly die while men have the feelings and passions of humanity.

May I not ask here whether people have not turned away from the stage because little by little it has ceased to be English; because it has ceased to deal with our own manners and our own circumstances, and has drawn all its inspirations from foreign sources? If such be the case, would it not be possible to entice the truants back? Speak them fairly and agree to treat them well, and they will perhaps return.

At any rate we might try.

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